

2014 Recruiting Issue

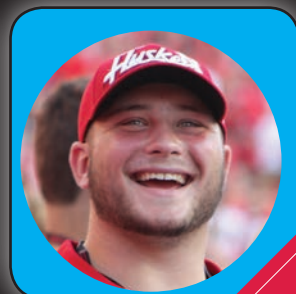
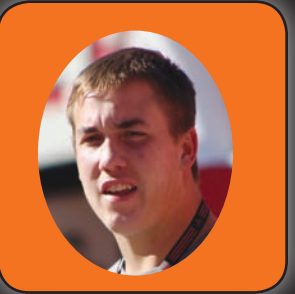
THE ORIGINAL MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO NEBRASKA ATHLETICS

HUSKERS

ILLUSTRATED

BOOM!

24 pieces fall into place for
NU's 2014 recruiting class





2014 TOP 100 RECRUITING CLASSES

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Alabama (26) | 35. NEBRASKA (24) | 69. Western Michigan (27) |
| 2. LSU (23) | 36. West Virginia (22) | 70. ILLINOIS (18) |
| 3. OHIO STATE (23) | 37. Washington (24) | 71. Temple (29) |
| 4. Florida State (29) | 38. Mississippi State (23) | 72. PURDUE (18) |
| 5. Texas A&M (21) | 39. Missouri (29) | 73. San Diego State (25) |
| 6. Auburn (23) | 40. South Florida (28) | 74. Houston (26) |
| 7. Tennessee (33) | 41. Texas Tech (26) | 75. East Carolina (27) |
| 8. Georgia (21) | 42. TCU (24) | 76. Colorado (22) |
| 9. Florida (24) | 43. MARYLAND (17) | 77. Old Dominion (31) |
| 10. Notre Dame (23) | 44. Pittsburgh (23) | 78. SMU (26) |
| 11. USC (19) | 45. NORTHWESTERN (16) | 79. Memphis (24) |
| 12. Miami (26) | 46. Vanderbilt (22) | 80. Tulsa (23) |
| 13. Stanford (20) | 47. Louisville (20) | 81. Fresno State (24) |
| 14. Oklahoma (27) | 48. California (22) | 82. Louisiana Tech (20) |
| 15. South Carolina (21) | 49. Kansas State (24) | 83. San Jose State (19) |
| 16. Ole Miss (25) | 50. Syracuse (24) | 84. Southern Miss (23) |
| 17. Texas (23) | 51. INDIANA (28) | 85. Colorado State (25) |
| 18. Clemson (20) | 52. Boston College (28) | 86. Western Kentucky (27) |
| 19. UCLA (18) | 53. Iowa (21) | 87. Nevada (27) |
| 20. MICHIGAN (16) | 54. Georgia Tech (21) | 88. Tulane (20) |
| 21. Oregon (20) | 55. Kansas (23) | 89. Georgia Southern (20) |
| 22. Kentucky (29) | 56. Iowa State (25) | 90. Toledo (23) |
| 23. Arizona State (28) | 57. Duke (18) | 91. Middle Tennessee State (22) |
| 24. PENN STATE (25) | 58. UCF (17) | 92. Appalachian State (27) |
| 25. MICHIGAN STATE (23) | 59. RUTGERS (25) | 93. Rice (19) |
| 26. Baylor (28) | 60. Oregon State (29) | 94. Florida Atlantic (23) |
| 27. Virginia Tech (27) | 61. Wake Forest (26) | 95. Arkansas State (24) |
| 28. Oklahoma State | 62. Utah (19) | 96. Buffalo (23) |
| 29. North Carolina (22) | 63. Marshall (27) | 97. Texas State (26) |
| 30. Arkansas (24) | 64. MINNESOTA (20) | 98. Northern Illinois (31) |
| 31. Arizona (29) | 65. Washington State (19) | 99. New Mexico (25) |
| 32. Virginia (17) | 66. Brigham Young (20) | 100. Georgia State (24) |
| 33. WISCONSIN (26) | 67. Cincinnati (26) | |
| 34. North Carolina State (30) | 68. Boise State (20) | |

THE ORIGINAL MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO NEBRASKA ATHLETICS

HUSKERS

ILLUSTRATED

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Editor, General Manager: **DARREN IVY**
darrenivy@huskersillustrated.com

Photographer: **JOE MIXAN**

Photographer: **JIM RASH**

Photographer: **MITCH OTTO**

Recruiting Writer: **MIKE SCHAEFER**

Beat Writer: **MICHAEL BRUNTZ**

Beat Writer: **CHRIS PETERS**

Beat Writer: **LANNY HOLSTEIN**

Contributing Writer: **DOUG GRIFFITHS**

Contributing Writer: **BRIAN ROSENTHAL**

Contributing Writer: **BOB HAMAR**

ADVERTISING

Tim Francis (800) 524-9527 Ext. 111
or Darren Ivy (402) 762-5352

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The next Huskers Illustrated Edition, featuring the Spring Game and 2015 season, will mail at the end of April 2014.

Contents

MARCH/APRIL 2014 * VOLUME 34 * NO. 3

COLUMNS

4

FROM THE EDITOR

BY **DARREN IVY**

The Huskers lost "one of the good guys" recently with the passing of Larry Kramer.

8

RECRUITING NOTEBOOK

BY **MICHAEL SCHAEFER**

It was a long, strange trip for Nebraska's Class of 2014 to sign with the Huskers.

23

STATE OF THE HUSKERS

BY **MICHAEL BRUNTZ**

Nebraska already has a good jump on the Class of 2015 with four players verbally committed before 2014 signing day even arrived.

FEATURE

26-28

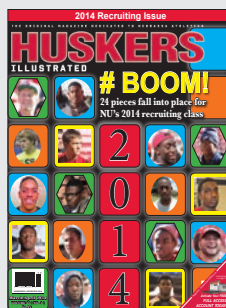
TWO-MINUTE DRILL

BY **CHRIS PETERS**,

Current Husker Ameer Abdullah and former great Ahman Green share many similarities, but leaving for NFL early won't be one of them.

2014 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	SITE	TIME	TV/SCORE
APR 12	SPRING GAME	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
AUG. 30	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
SEPT. 6	MCNEESE STATE	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
SEPT. 13	@FRESNO STATE	FRESNO, CALIF.	TBA	TBD
SEPT. 20	MIAMI	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
SEPT. 27	ILLINOIS	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
OCT. 4	@MICHIGAN STATE	EAST LANSING, MICH.	TBA	TBD
OCT. 18	@NORTHWESTERN	EVANSTON, ILL.	TBA	TBD
OCT. 25	RUTGERS	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
NOV. 1	PURDUE	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
NOV. 15	@WISCONSIN	MADISON, WIS.	TBA	TBD
NOV. 22	MINNESOTA	MEMORIAL STADIUM	TBA	TBD
NOV. 28	@IOWA	IOWA CITY, IA	TBA	TBD
DEC. 6	@BIG TEN TITLE GAME	INDIANAPOLIS, IND.	TBA	TBD



ON THE COVER

#Boom was the trending topic for Husker defensive coordinator John Papuchis on his Twitter handle when Nebraska was able to land commitments for the 2014 recruiting class. On signing day, NU ended up with 24 players and are still holding out hope that Robert Lockhart will be added to the class at a later date.

PHOTO BY ADDISON FITZGERALD/HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED

FORMER HUSKER LARRY KRAMER WAS ONE OF GOOD GUYS

HUSKER NATION LOST A “WONDERFUL GUY” ON JAN. 25 WITH THE PASSING OF FORMER ALL-AMERICAN OFFENSIVE LINEMAN LARRY KRAMER IN ROSSVILLE, KAN.

Kramer, 71, succumbed after a long battle with CTE, which is a crippling brain disease that has been in the national spotlight due to many former professional football players being diagnosed with it.

I never had the pleasure of meeting Larry, as he was quite a bit older and out of the state by the time I came along, but learned a lot about the Minnesota native from one of my family relatives, who described him as her “favorite Husker of all-time.”

Audrey Peil had first met Larry’s widow, Sandy Van Norman, back in the summer of 1962 when she was taking summer school classes with her at Hastings College. She and Sandy, who was from Bassett, became close friends. Audrey was honored to sing in their wedding.

Their friendship grew from there and on home football game day weekends Audrey would hop on the train from Hastings and meet Sandy in Lincoln and take care of their young daughter Kelly so Sandy could watch her husband play for the Huskers.

At the time Audrey met Kramer, he was part of an offensive line in 1963 that included future NFL players Bob Brown, Lloyd Voss and John Kirby. That team led the nation in rushing in 1963. He was actually drafted by the Baltimore Colts before his senior season but came back in 1964 and ended up being the only unanimous selection to the 1964 All-American football team that included such legends as Gale Sayers and Dick Butkus.

He signed a free agent contract with the Minnesota Vikings, but accordingly to an interview with Kirby by Husker Insider Randy York, he disliked the hazing of new players and left before taking a snap in the NFL.

“Norm Van Brocklin was the Vikings’ head coach at the time, and I was in my second year with the Vikings,” Kirby told York. “Van Brocklin was able to talk Larry into coming back to camp, but after one day, he packed his bags and left again. I did a lot of film study with Coach Van Brocklin. He went after Larry; he wanted him, and he gave him a second chance. Even back then, that hardly



ever happened. Larry Kramer was definitely good enough to play in the NFL, but he made a wise decision. He became a fantastic coach, and looking back, I’m not so sure he didn’t have his heart already set on coaching when he came to training camp. He was sort of destined to be a coach.”

Once he gave up his NFL dreams, Kramer served as a graduate assistant at NU before taking over as the head coach at McCook Junior College. He then went to Southern Oregon College in Ashland, Ore. Before moving to Austin College from 1973-82. A year after leading the Kangaroos to a NAIA national championship Kramer took over as the head coach at Emporia State and stayed until 1994. He guided them to a berth in the NAIA championship game. He ended his coaching career as a tight ends coach at Kansas State under Bill Snyder, who ironically had been an assistant to Kramer at Austin in 1974-75. He was inducted into the Nebraska Football Hall of Fame in 1987.

During much of Kramer’s coaching career, Audrey said Sandy was busy with her family of four children and nine grandchildren, while Peil did the same and the two lost touch. A chance meeting of some common friends and Audrey’s son-in-law in Kansas a few years back reconnected the two. When Peil’s daughter, Yvonne, called her in late January, telling her she had just heard of Kramer’s passing, Audrey immediately called Sandy.

“Wouldn’t you know, Kelly answered,” Audrey said. “I told her I hadn’t seen her since she was a baby. I told her I used to babysit her as a baby.”

Despite his passing, Kramer will always hold a special place in Audrey’s heart as well as former players and coaches who have spoken fondly of him in recent interviews.

“He deserved recognition because he was a good, good person,” Peil said.



NEBRASKA’S 2014 TO 2017 OPPONENTS

2014 SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Location
8/30	Florida Atlantic	Lincoln, Neb.
9/6	McNeese State	Lincoln, Neb.
9/13	Fresno State	Fresno, Calif.
9/20	Miami (Fla.)	Lincoln, Neb.
9/27	Illinois	Lincoln, Neb.
10/4	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.
10/18	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.
10/25	Rutgers	Lincoln, Neb.
11/1	Purdue	Lincoln, Neb.
11/15	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.
11/22	Minnesota	Lincoln, Neb.
11/28	Iowa	Iowa City, Ia.
12/6	Big Ten Game	Indianapolis, Ind.

2015 SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Location
9/5	BYU	Lincoln, Neb.
9/12	South Alabama	Lincoln, Neb.
9/19	Miami (Fla.)	Miami, Fla.
9/26	Southern Miss	Lincoln, Neb.
10/3	Illinois	Champaign, Ill.
10/10	Wisconsin	Lincoln, Neb.
10/17	Minnesota	Minneapolis, Minn.
10/24	Northwestern	Lincoln, Neb.
10/31	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.
11/7	Michigan State	Lincoln, Neb.
11/14	Rutgers	Piscataway, N.J.
11/27	Iowa	Lincoln, Neb.
12/5	Big Ten Game	Indianapolis, Ind.

2016 SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Location
9/3	Fresno State	Lincoln, Neb.
9/10	Wyoming	Lincoln, Neb.
9/17	Oregon	Lincoln, Neb.
10/1	Illinois	Lincoln, Neb.
10/8	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.
10/15	Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.
10/22	Purdue	Lincoln, Neb.
10/29	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.
11/5	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio
11/12	Minnesota	Lincoln, Neb.
11/19	Maryland	Lincoln, Neb.
11/25	Iowa	Iowa City, Ia.
12/3	Big Ten Game	Indianapolis, Ind.

2017 SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Location
9/2	TBA	Lincoln, Neb.
9/9	Oregon	Eugene, Ore.
9/16	Northern Illinois	Lincoln, Neb.
9/23	Rutgers	Lincoln, Neb.
9/30	Illinois	Champaign, Ill.
10/7	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.
10/14	Ohio State	Lincoln, Neb.
10/28	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.
11/4	Northwestern	Lincoln, Neb.
11/11	Minnesota	Minneapolis, Minn.
11/18	Penn State	State College, Pa.
11/24	Iowa	Lincoln, Neb.
12/2	Big Ten Game	TBD

Cornhuskers receive 24 letters of intent

STORY BY CHRIS PETERS | PHOTO BY MICHAEL BRUNTZ

Bo Pelini is still trying to figure out what the move to the Big Ten does for Nebraska's recruiting.

When the Huskers still resided in the Big 12, Pelini and his coaches primarily targeted Texas, Florida, California and the 500-mile radius around Lincoln. But lately, the focus has shifted eastward, spending less time in California and more time in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

"We've kind of moved east," Pelini said. "You have to acquire data, and you have to evaluate it. You've got to look at the facts as much as you can."

Those facts showed him that, even though Nebraska hasn't physically moved from Lincoln, recruits associate Nebraska more with a Big Ten mentality, moving away from what they would normally think about the Big 12.

"Some recruits perceive Nebraska as if it's going to playing in the snow every week," Pelini said.

As a result, Pelini and his staff have tried to key in on Big Ten territory, hitting Ohio and Pennsylvania hard.

In recent years, those areas have been successful, especially Ohio. This year, the Huskers struck out in both states, but did happen to gain a pair of recruits from Illinois.

"We recruited those areas," Pelini said. "We've had some success in Ohio over the last couple years, not as much this year. It probably depends on the year."

As the year moved on and the Huskers narrowed their focus to specific needs – like defensive line – they began to move south. Coaches spent a considerable amount of time in Florida, Georgia

D.J. Foster, Luke Gifford, Mick Stoltenberg and Monte Harrison walk out during a game weekend.



and Louisiana, trying to gain late commits.

Pelini worked on flipping commits to other schools along the way. One day after flipping a UCF commit, he crossed paths on the recruiting trail with Knights coach George O'Leary, even exchanging words.

As Pelini scattered his recruits late in the recruiting cycle, he called on the Nebraska administration for a helping hand. Rather than flying commercially, the university helped Pelini's assistants recruit by allowing them private flights.

As a result, the Huskers nabbed eight recruits after the dead period leading up to signing day. While momentum was building late in the class, things became complicated when Terry Joseph, NU's defensive backs coach and primary New Orleans-area recruiter, left for Texas A&M.

Pelini tried to salvage Joseph's recruiting progress with the quick hire of Georgia-native and former Air Force defensive

backs coach Charlton Warren.

"It's obvious in the short amount of time he's been here that he's an outstanding recruiter," Pelini said. "He's going to be a huge benefit to our staff, not only as a secondary coach, but as a recruiter."

"... He couldn't get out (and recruit) fast enough. He hit the ground running as soon as he got here, and I thought he did a tremendous job for us."

Warren's role late helped solidify the class and keep the wheels from coming off. He reassured defensive back commit Trai Mosley and earned commitments from defensive back Chris Jones and quarterback A.J. Bush to help finish the class strong.

Looking forward, Pelini said Warren will be a big help in recruiting Georgia. In a year where recruiting traditional spots like Ohio, Pennsylvania and California produced little results, having a hot spot in a recruiting hotbed can be a crucial advantage.

The team's success in the

south could turn into a trend, but for now, Pelini said it's too early to know where next year's successes will come.

It's clear that no matter where the recruits come from, once they show up in Lincoln for a visit, the Huskers can make up ground quickly.

Nebraska hosted a swarm of players Feb. 1 and 2, a mix of high school juniors and seniors in a late effort to bolster the class. By the end of the weekend, the Huskers had gained nearly 10 commitments between the 2014 and 2015 classes.

When the marathon to Signing Day finally came to a close, Pelini said he's happy with the class he put together.

"I feel great about this signing class and what it'll bring to the table," Pelini said. "I know the coaches went a long way, watched a lot of film and scoured a lot of territory to find this group. Not only good football players, but kids who are right for the University of Nebraska."

2014 RECRUITING CLASS

2014 Football Signees

SCHOLARSHIP SIGNEES

Name (247Sports Ranking)	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown	High School/Junior College
Freedom Akinmoladun ★★ ★ (86)	TE	6-5	238	Hillsboro, Mo.	Grandview High School
Drew Brown ★★ (78)	K	5-10	160	Southlake, Tex.	Southlake High School
AJ Bush ★★ (79)	QB	6-3	211	Norcross, Ga.	Norcross High School
*Byerson Cockrell ★★ ★ (86)	S	6-2	185	Scooba, Miss.	East Mississippi Community College
*Zach Darlington ★★ ★ (90)	QB	6-2	207	Apopka, Fla.	Apopka High School
Tanner Farmer ★★ ★ ★ (92)	OG	6-3.5	302	Highland Park, Ill.	Highland Park High School
D.J. Foster ★★ ★ (87)	OG	6-1	300	Lincoln, Neb.	Southeast High School
Nick Gates ★★ ★ ★ (92)	OT	6-5	270	Las Vegas, Nev.	Bishop Gorman High School
Luke Gifford ★★ ★ (82)	ATH	6-3	195	Lincoln, Neb.	Southeast High School
Monte Harrison ★★ ★ ★ (93)	WR	6-3	200	Lee's Summit, Mo.	Lee's Summit West High School
Glenn Irons ★★ (79)	WR	5-10	170	New Orleans, La.	Edna Karr High School
Chris Jones ★★ ★ (87)	ATH	6-0	175	Jacksonville, Fla.	Sandalwood High School
Josh Kalu ★★ ★ (83)	S	6-0	171	Houston, Tex.	Alief Taylor High School
*Joe Keels ★★ ★ ★ (93)	DT	6-4	275	Highland, Kan.	Highland Community College
Sedrick King ★★ ★ (82)	WDE	6-3.5	250	Plant City, Fla.	Plant City High School
Robert Lockhart ★★ ★ (89)	WR	6-1	185	Raymond, Miss.	Hinds Community College
Trai Mosley ★★ ★ (86)	CB	5-10	171	Pflugerville, Tex.	Hendrickson High School
Peyton Newell ★★ ★ ★ (90)	DT	6-2	290	Hiawatha, Kan.	Hiawatha Senior High
Demornay Pierson-El ★★ ★ (92)	ATH	5-9	171	Alexandria, Va.	West Potomac High School
Lorenzo Stewart ★★ ★ (87)	APB	5-6	170	Spring, Tex.	Klein Oak High School
Mick Stoltenberg ★★ ★ (84)	SDE	6-6	250	Gretna, Neb.	Gretna High School
Jariah Tolbert ★★ ★ (81)	WR	6-3	185	New Orleans, La.	Edna Karr High School
Jaevon Walton ★★ ★ (92)	ILB	6-0	230	New Orleans, La.	Edna Karr High School
Mikale Wilbon ★★ ★ ★ (90)	RB	5-9	195	Chicago, Ill.	De La Salle Institute
DeAndre Willis ★★ (79)	WDE	6-3	262	Lineville, Ala.	Clay Central High School

*-enrolled at Nebraska in January

TEXAS (4)

Kalu (Houston), Brown (Southlake),
Mosley (Pflugerville), Stewart (Spring)

FLORIDA (3)

Jones (Jacksonville), King (Plant
City), Darlington (Apopka)

NEBRASKA (3)

Foster (Lincoln), Gifford (Lincoln),
Stoltenberg (Gretna)

LOUISIANA (3)

Tolbert (New Orleans), Walton
(New Orleans), Iron (New Orleans)

MISSOURI (2)

Akinmoladun (Hillsboro), Harrison
(Lee's Summit)

ILLINOIS (2)

Wilbon (Chicago), Farmer (Highland
Park)

KANSAS (2)

Newell (Hiawatha), Keels
(Highland)

ALABAMA (1)

Willis (Lineville)

MISSISSIPPI (1)

Cockrell (Scooba)

GEORGIA (1)

Bush (Norcross)

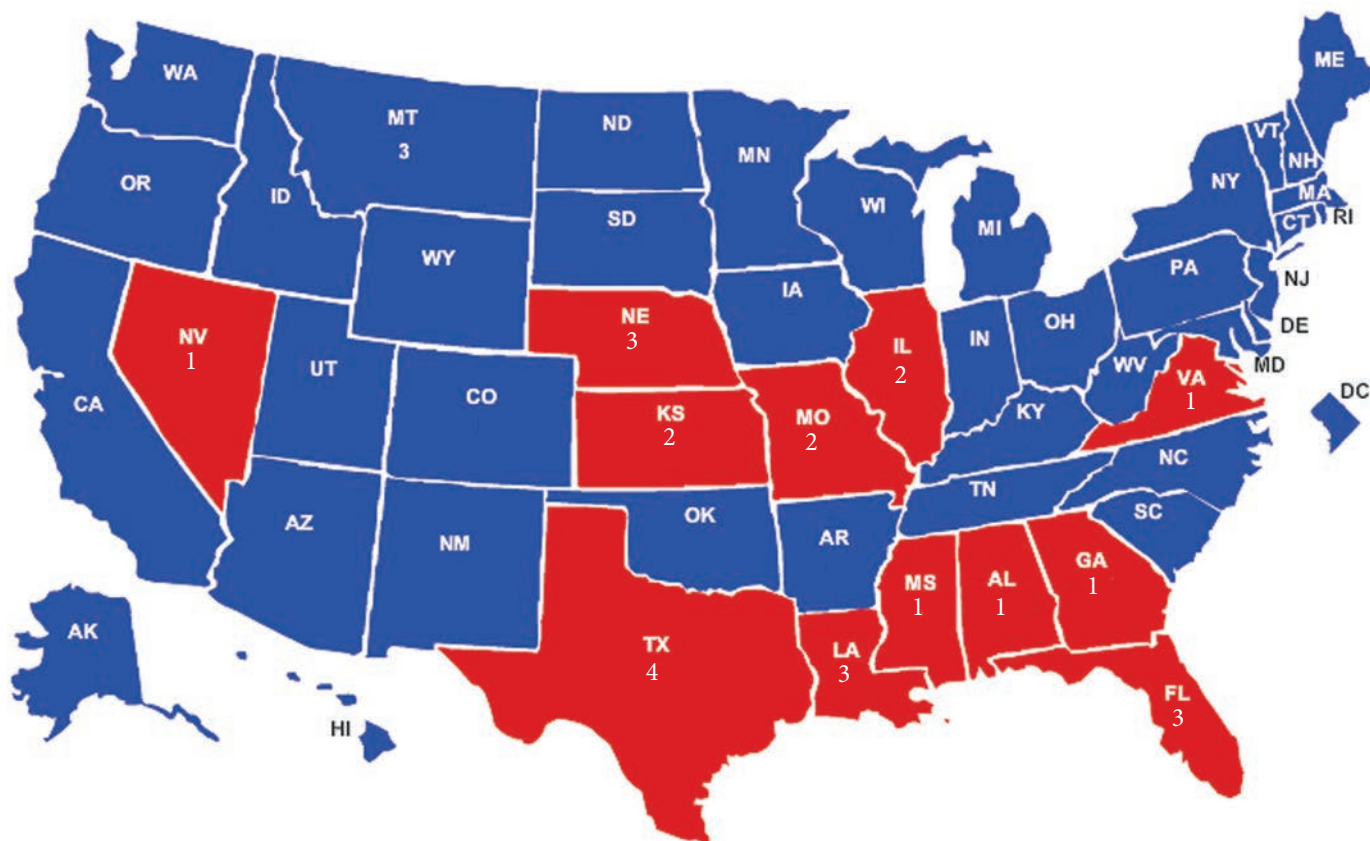
VIRGINIA (1)

Pierson-El (Alexandria)

NEVADA (1)

Gates (Las Vegas)

2014 Recruits by State



2014 WALK-ON COMMITS

Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown	High School/Junior College
Noah Arneson	DL	6-3	300	Omaha, Neb.	Omaha Gross HS
Alex Boryca	LB	6-2	220	Cozad, Neb.	Cozad HS
Cole Conrad	OL	6-5	280	Fremont, Neb.	Archbishop Bergan HS
Ryan Freudenburg	OL	6-5	290	Norfolk, Neb.	Lutheran-Northeast HS
Nolan Graham	DB	5-11	195	Firth, Neb.	Norris HS
Blake Holtmeier	WR	6-2	190	Kearney, Neb.	Kearney Catholic HS
Cameron Jakub	DB	5-11	170	Columbus, Neb.	Columbus HS
Matt Jarzynka	DE	6-4	220	Loup City, Neb.	Loup City HS
Bo Kitrell	FB/LB	6-1	210	Ashland, Neb.	Ashland-Greenwood HS
Creighton Koley	DB	6-0	185	Omaha, Neb.	Skutt Catholic HS
Nate Meduna	TE	6-5	220	Wahoo, Neb.	Bishop Neumann HS
Trent Ortmeier	OL	6-6	270	West Point, Neb.	Guardian Angels Catholic HS
Dylan Owen	DL	6-5	240	Westchester, N.Y.	Bridgton Academy/Somers HS
Brady Pelzer	WR	5-11	170	Bellevue, Neb.	Bellevue East HS
Garrett Poppen	LB	6-1	215	Giltner, Neb.	Giltner HS
Bryan Reimers	TE	6-5	205	Lincoln, Neb.	Lincoln East HS
Austin Rose	RB	6-1	220	Lincoln, Neb.	Lincoln North Star HS
Jack Van Almen	LB	6-1	215	Rochester Hills, Mich.	Stoney Creek HS



RECRUITING NOTEBOOK

BY MICHAEL SCHAEFER
RECRUITING EDITOR
HUSKERSILLUSTRATED.COM

A long, strange trip for the NU's 2014 class

It's always an unusual journey to National Signing Day, but Nebraska's 2014 class might have taken one of the stranger trips in recent memory.

The Huskers started off slow as the first commitment – Luke Gifford – didn't happen until mid-March. A month followed before the next commitment from defensive back Jason Hall but he ultimately flipped to Texas at the end of the summer.

Things didn't really kick off until June.

The Huskers had a fantastic month with commitments from Tanner Farmer, Drew Brown, Zack Darlington and Trai Mosley all leading to Big Red Weekend.

The annual summer fest for targeted Nebraska recruits went very well in 2013 as the Huskers landed key commitments from Mick Stoltenberg, D.J. Foster, Demornay Pierson-El and Peyton Newell – who chose to wait on publicly announcing it.

Just a few weeks later the commitments rolled in again – this time from Freedom Akinmoladun, a talented tight end who chose to make the best use of July 4. He was soon joined by four-star wide receiver Monte Harrison that same night. The next day Lorenzo Stewart surprised NU fans with an early commitment.

Unlike the rest of Nebraska's commits, Stewart had

never been to Lincoln.

Following that run, things really quieted for the Huskers who held a few modest visit weekends in September, before convincing Josh Kalu to commit in October. A month later Nebraska cashed in on a strong run of visits in November to land commitments from Robert Lockhart, Jaevon Walton and then Terrell Clinkscales and Chance Waz. Both would later decommit.

November was an interesting month because the Huskers brought in a number of visitors, while dealing with a potential coaching change. Following a public statement of support for Bo Pelini and the program, Nebraska ripped through the first two weeks of the December visit period landing JUCO defensive back Byerson Cockrell, JUCO defensive tackle Joe Keels and defensive lineman Darius Slade, who would decommit in January.

The Huskers entered the final month with a lot of uncertainty and open spots. Jariah Tolbert was the first to jump on board, surprising a number of fans unfamiliar with the Edna Karr wide receiver. Sandalwood cornerback Chris Jones followed suit on Martin Luther King Jr. day, flipping from Purdue to Nebraska.

The Huskers then went on a long stretch of commitments as Bishop Gorman's Nick Gates committed following a strong in-home. Edna Karr

receiver Glenn Irons committed on his visit to Nebraska. The next day Mikale Wilbon committed after an in-home from Bo Pelini and Ron Brown. Plant (Fla.) defensive end Sedrick King closed the four-day run with a surprise commitment after a stealth visit to Nebraska.

The Huskers finished up the class on the final weekend by adding A.J. Bush. Nebraska took commits from Markell Boston and Blake McClain but the two players ultimately went to Auburn and South Carolina respectively.

Biggest Class Surprise

Nebraska's success with the three Louisiana kids might play big dividends down the line for the Huskers. It's already lead to Kendall Bussey committing for 2015 and it might be a bit of a selling point for coaches when they go in the area. Rich Fisher seems to be the new coach hunting New Orleans and the Bayous at the moment.

Best use of the short game

Mikale Wilbon was a gift wrapped present for Nebraska after James Franklin left Vanderbilt for Penn State. The running back considered his options but a visit to Nebraska sealed the deal and the Huskers added a solid between the tackles runner. The key for Wilbon will be to show durability. The last two seasons were marred by injury.

Best use of the long game
Nebraska won Nick Gates

ultimately because the staff put in a lot of time and Barney Cotton built a great relationship with the offensive lineman and his family. Gates is one of the top signees in the class and he'll be someone that could have a starting job for multiple years on the right side of the line.

Where'd you come from?

Both Sedrick King and DeAndre Wills committed to Nebraska during official visits that the Husker staff sought to keep quiet. Both players are extremely raw but athletic defensive ends and will have plenty to learn from NU assistant Rick Kaczinski.

First Contract of 2014, but not the last?

Monte Harrison signed his name to take a Nebraska football scholarship and also plans to play baseball for the Huskers, but he's going to get offered a lot of money by whoever drafts him this June. Baseball looks to be Harrison's future, which just might cost the Huskers its best wide receiver prospect in years.

Biggest decommitment

Logic says it's recently departed Blake McClain or Terrell Clinkscales but one name most might have forgotten is Texas signee Jason Hall.

This safety would have thrived in Nebraska's aggressive, downhill scheme.

Instead, he earned a Texas offer and opted to stay home.

N

247Sports analysts evaluate NU's class

Now that Nebraska's class is in the books we gathered some of the top talent evaluators at 247Sports to take a look at what the Huskers did. Nebraska's No. 35 finish left it in the middle of the Big Ten's rankings, but NU did some good things and might have a few intriguing guys to watch in the coming years.

Overall Class Thoughts

Brian Perroni, 247Sports analyst: I don't know Nebraska's exact needs, but to me I like to judge a class of its two lines. I really like who they've picked up. The Joe Keels kid out of junior college – we had him ranked higher than others – but I think he has a chance to be really productive. The two offensive linemen from out of state – Tanner Farmer and Nick Gates – are really good. I've had a chance to see both of those guys. I think Farmer is a workhorse and a hoss. Then Gates was way better than I expected at the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl. He's definitely a tackle, probably on the right side.

J.C. Shurburt, 247Sports National Recruiting Director: Nebraska is known for building on the lines and that's what we're seeing here. I really like Peyton Newell. I think he's a player that you want to get right out of Kansas. Joe Keels I think has a lot of upside. Nick Gates Tanner Farmer and Mikale Wilbon – that's two offensive linemen and a running back right there. Throw in a guy like Monte Harrison. That's a pretty good deal. They've done a pretty good job. It's an evaluation class. I like the size of the class. I like the strength on the line of scrimmage. I like the quarterbacks. I think it's a good class. The one thing that Bo Pelini and his staff have proven is that those guys will coach them up, develop the crap out of them and win some football games like they've been doing. There's an opportunity now in the Big Ten with the traditional team going East. Someone has to rise in the West. May as well be Nebraska.

Barton Simmons, 247Sports National Recruiting Analyst: It's really strong on the line of scrimmage if you look at Tanner Farmer, Nick Gates and D.J. Foster. Those are really tough, physical offensive linemen. I think you can build around those kind of blue collar guys. I really like the job that they did on the offensive line. The defensive line is kind of the same way with Peyton Newell and Joe Keels, two really talented defensive linemen. They added some kind of under-the-radar guys Sedrick King, DeAndre



J.C. Shurburt



Brian Perroni



Barton Simmons



Steve Wiltfong

Wills) that they seem to be really high on. They've got some length and athleticism. I like what they've done on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

Steve Wiltfong, 247Sports analyst: I think you have to love what they did up front on the offensive line. Tanner Farmer, Nick Gates, D.J. Foster I could see those three being representative of a hard nose Nebraska offensive line for many of years. Then you flip over and you've got Joe Keels who can come in and be a difference maker in the same fashion that Randy Gregory did last year.

Stake your name to two guys

Perroni: I'd forgotten about this guy, but I'm way higher on D.J. Foster than probably anyone else is. I saw him in person dominating camps and was dominant at Semper Fi against some pretty good defensive linemen. I'd say Foster and Nick Gates. I'm a big fan of Gates as a tackle. He received a big bump in these last rankings. I think he's going to really help at tackle.

Shurburt: Tanner Farmer and Mick Stoltenberg. Tanner is just a big Nebraska-like offensive lineman. He's good and athletic. We saw him compete against some top guys. He might be a little underrated a little bit. With Stoltenberg it's all about Frame. You know he's 6-foot-6, 245 pounds. He could be 290 easy. Plus, he's got a great football name.

Two analysts feel Nebraska got a late steal in A.J. Bush.

Simmons: I'd probably say Tanner Farmer and Mikale Wilbon. I really like Wilbon a lot. I worry about his durability. As long as he comes back healthy and is able to stay healthy, he's going to be a really good football player. If he didn't have the injuries throughout his high school career we'd be talking about a top 100 type of running back. That hurt him a little bit. Then Farmer is just one of those offensive linemen with the

right mentality and a lot of toughness. He's a lunch pail guy. He's got a great compass about him. He's plenty athletic as well.

Wiltfong: I think Tanner Farmer and Nick Gates are two guys that can have really big careers in Lincoln. Those are guys that can really leave their mark on Nebraska by the time they are done. Gates will come in with a great foundation and ready to learn. Farmer is just a nasty sun-of-a-gun up front. He's just a guy that defeats people.

Class sleeper

Perroni: Trai Mosley is a good player at cornerback. Nebraska was on him very early and after he committed to them he picked up offers from Baylor, Oklahoma and TCU. He ended up sticking to his Nebraska pledge. He may not be the biggest kid at 5-foot-10, but he's a guy that can cover. He's a kid that can make an impact for sure.

Shurburt: I think A.J. Bush simply because of scheme. Maybe if he was going to another school you wouldn't say that because of the scheme I think you could really see him do a few good things.

Simmons: I would say the biggest sleeper type guy is AJ Bush. I saw him place twice. He's big and very athletic. He's a winner. He makes plays at important times in games. I don't know if he's a quarterback at the next level – maybe he develops his game and kind of becomes a true quarterback – but he's a type of kid that's a win-win. Either he becomes a solid quarterback and develops in that regard or he's a kid that still has the body and athleticism that can help you out in other areas. That's a good guy to take a chance on late in the game.

Wiltfong: Demornay Pierson-El is going to be their jumbo slot guy. That's who I'm going with. He's a guy with the way Nebraska wants to play offense when they're healthy, he's a guy that is very dangerous in space.

FREEDOM AKINMOLADUN

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • TE - 32 • Missouri - 14

Freedom Akinmoladun couldn't have committed to Nebraska on a more fitting day.

Freedom rang offensive line coach Barney Cotton on July 4 to tell him that he was coming to play football at Nebraska.

"I felt like it would be a good time to make a decision," Akinmoladun said. "I don't know if I heard him yelling, but my phone was cutting out, but I'm pretty sure he was yelling when I committed."

Akinmoladun is a high three-star prospect out of Grandview, Mo., in the greater-Kansas City area, ranked as the No. 32 tight end in the country by 247Sports. His 6-foot-5, 238 pound frame provides a strong base for the position if he can bulk up for Big Ten play, his coach Andy Leech said.

"He is involved in so many sports and activities in high school, he hasn't had the time in the weight room that one-sport athletes have," Leech said. "I am sure it won't take long though."

Akinmoladun turned down scholarship offers at Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kansas State and Northern Illinois and only took one official visit – to Nebraska on Nov. 29 for the Heroes Game against Iowa.



Early in his high school career, Akinmoladun played left tackle for his high school, following in his brother's footsteps. Older brother Olukayode started on the University of Nebraska-Kearney offensive line last season at guard.

As a lineman, Akinmoladun developed a prowess for blocking that translated to his tight end spot.

"As a blocker, he is one of the best I have ever

seen," Leech said. "He takes pride in blocking till the whistle and controlling his man."

During his junior year, Leech flexed Akinmoladun to tight end to take advantage of his speed. During the offseason, Akinmoladun repetitively caught pass after pass, developing his hands to try and become a versatile tight end. Leech said his work paid off.

"He never dropped a ball in high school and made several circus catches," Leech said. "He has all the skills anyone could want in a tight end."

At Nebraska, he could be counted on to contribute early at tight end. The second tight end spot behind Cethan Carter will be up for grabs this fall, and Akinmoladun will try to use his versatility to get himself on the field early. Leech noted Akinmoladun's leadership qualities and excellence in the classroom, saying that the two will help him absorb the playbook quickly and ensure that he'll be ready to go should his number be called early in his NU career.

"Hopefully I become a great target in the offense," Akinmoladun said. "I want to be a great target for the quarterback. I expect to grow up, become a man and help out wherever I need to be at."

DREW BROWN

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • K - 11 • Texas - 288

Drew Brown always planned on kicking for Nebraska. His older brother Kris set school and conference records as a four-year starter from 1995-98 before going on to play in the NFL for more than a decade. Brown wants to follow in his footsteps.

He's been coming to Nebraska games since he was born – halfway through Kris' freshman year at Nebraska. When he finally turned his soccer skills into football kicking skills in middle school, things took off quickly. Brown attended Nebraska's summer kicking camp every year throughout high school. In his first year at the camp, competing against handfuls of high school seniors, Brown knocked through a 51-yarder.

"They had a ton of guys there they were trying to recruit and I out-kicked all of them," Brown said.

Now, he can hit within 50 yards consistently, he said. His longest in a game is 51, but he's made it from 60 in practice. Nebraska's coaches have been watching Brown for quite a while. They used to joke about him coming to kick in Lincoln someday. This summer, during his fourth time at the camp, they stopped joking and offered him a scholarship.



"I immediately was in," Brown said. "Nebraska has always been the place I wanted to go. I never considered any place else."

Brown drove to Omaha to his brother's house, where he was staying, and broke the news.

"The look on his face was really surprised and pretty happy," Brown said. "He obviously knew deep down that I wanted to be there."

Growing up, Brown worked with his broth-

er off and on, developing his technique. Kris would show Drew the basics of how to kick the ball well and would teach him helpful drills.

Brown made all 10 field goal attempts this year for Southlake Carroll (Texas) High School, the same alma mater as his brother. He made all but one of his 90 extra point attempts, drilling a season-long 51-yard field goal.

His kickoffs touch the end zone 65 percent of the time in practice, he said. It's a number he's eager to improve on.

"It's just a matter of staying in the weight room and staying in good shape and staying flexible," Brown said.

Brown's coach, Hal Wasson, said Brown's value doesn't end with his foot.

"He demonstrates great character, discipline and responsibility. The greatest compliment I can give him is that he was the ultimate teammate," Wasson said. "... No doubt, Nebraska got a great young man and kicker in Drew Brown."

Brown also plays outfielder for his high school team. He said he's talked to football coaches and baseball coach Darin Erstad – who punted for the football team and played baseball – about trying out for the baseball team, and he has their blessing.

AJ BUSH

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • QB - 41 • Georgia- 157

AJ Bush was waiting for a school like Nebraska to call. The dual-threat Georgia quarterback wanted to play for a team with a tradition of winning. He wanted a big-time program.

He held offers from Boston College, Cincinnati, Georgia State, Kansas State, Marshall, Temple and Toledo. Arkansas and Georgia Tech both told him they may offer before Signing Day, but when Nebraska offered in late January, the Georgia 6A State Championship quarterback acted fast.

"I felt really good about the Nebraska offer," Bush said. "It was a relief to me that a program with that history and that success winning and that tradition and fan support offered.

"That was a seller to me that a program like that put a lot of effort into getting me late."

The offer came out on Jan. 30, a Thursday, as new defensive backs coach and Georgia-native Charlton Warren visited Bush in his Norcross home. By Saturday, Bush was already in Lincoln on a visit.

Despite the bone-chilling temperatures in Lincoln, the Atlanta-area quarterback felt at home in Lincoln.

"As soon as I stepped off the plane, I knew that I was in the right spot," Bush said.



Hearing about the fans and gameday atmosphere got Bush excited. Meeting the players and the coaches sealed the deal. While meeting with coach Bo Pelini, Bush committed. The 6-foot-3, 211 pound Bush will join early-enrollee Zack Darlington (Apopka, Fla.) as the second quarterback in Nebraska's 2014 class.

"I have confidence in myself," Bush said. "I know how hard I'm going to work for this. I told

coaches as long as I had an equal opportunity to come in and compete, it's something that I embrace."

Bush has played quarterback since moving from running back in fourth grade. He is known for his arm strength and mobility, but said he's more of a complete quarterback than that.

"I view myself as not only an athletic quarterback but also as an intelligent one," Bush said.

Bush is rated as a two-star prospect by 247Sports and is ranked No. 41 among all dual-threat quarterbacks in the class. He carries a three-star rating by many other services.

Stars have never meant much to Bush, who said he wasn't able to make it out to most camps over the past two years because of basketball, leaving him with limited exposure to scouts. One of the few camps he did attend was the Elite 11 camp in Georgia, where he won the accuracy challenge. Former NFL quarterback Trent Dilfer told Bush after the camp that he has "a bright future playing at the next level" and that he was "one of the top quarterbacks to throw against the wind," Bush said.

Rather than let recruiting rankings dictate his talent, he said his play on the field is all that matters.

BYERSON COCKRELL

247Sports Rankings: National JC - 122 • S - 8 • Mississippi - 22

One week before Byerson Cockrell arrived on Nebraska's campus, he found out his position coach would no longer be waiting for him in Lincoln.

Defensive backs coach Terry Joseph, who had recruited Cockrell and was grooming him to be an immediate starter at cornerback or nickel, had accepted a job at Texas A&M. Cockrell, a JUCO player with three years to play two, felt blindsided.

"I'm glad he got me to a good school before he left," Cockrell said. "I hate that it happened, but that's life. Now we have to adjust to the new coach that's coming in."

Cockrell signed his letter of intent to play for Nebraska in November. On Jan. 13, he enrolled in classes alongside fellow early-enrollees defensive end Joe Keels and quarterback Zack Darlington.

At East Mississippi Community College, Cockrell played safety, helping lead his team to a perfect 12-0 record and a win over Georgia Military Academy in the NJCAA Championship. Nebraska's coaches told the 6-foot-2, 185 pound Cockrell that he'll make the move to cornerback this offseason.

Arriving in time for spring ball will give



Cockrell an edge on other newcomers like Trai Mosley and Chris Jones in the race for the open cornerback job. Cockrell will have a full six months on the other newcomers and will have a full spring to make the switch to corner and to begin learning. Cockrell said he feels like he's a good fit for Nebraska's defensive scheme and said it's similar to the one he is used to playing in.

"It's pretty familiar for me," Cockrell said.

"When I was on the visit, coach (Bo) Pelini explained to me what they do. I told him in junior college we pretty much do the same thing, but it's just a little different.

"Playing cornerback is going to be a challenge, but I feel like I can do it."

Cockrell is ranked as a three-star prospect and is ranked No. 122 in the 247Sports JUCO rankings and No. 7 among all JUCO safeties. He turned down offers from Louisiana-Monroe, Middle Tennessee State, Northern Colorado and Southern Miss to come to Nebraska.

At first, his plan was to stay in the south. But Nebraska's offer opened up his mind a bit more. His visit on Nov. 29 to watch Nebraska play Iowa sold him.

"I really liked the game and the facilities because I wasn't expecting that, because I'm not from here," he said.

Although Cockrell has been playing as a safety, he said Nebraska's experience producing elite corners combined with his adaptability should make it an easy transition to cornerback and nickelback. The chance to compete early for a spot in the starting lineup paved his path to Nebraska.

"I believe I can do it," he said.

ZACH DARLINGTON

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • QB - 10 • Florida - 46

Many people worried that Zack Darlington would never play football again. Two months after a tire fell on him in practice – causing a trauma-induced stutter in his speech – Darlington took a gruesome hit near the sideline in a nationally-televised game in August. The second major concussion in as many months left Darlington unconscious. He would leave the game in a medical helicopter, strapped to a stretcher with a brace around his neck.

“I was worried,” Darlington said.

Nebraska coach Bo Pelini called him after less than a day in the hospital. He wanted to reassure the dual-threat quarterback – who had been committed to Nebraska for less than three months – the he would still have a place at NU.

“Nebraska never once hesitated on whether they were going to keep my scholarship intact,” Darlington said. “The day I was in the hospital after getting that hit, Bo said ‘I know Zack, you’re probably worried. Whether or not you play football ever again, we will honor your scholarship.’ You only get a certain amount of spots. To be willing to give up one of those spots, that says a lot about the university and its loyalty.”

Darlington, who was ranked the No. 11 dual-threat quarterback in the country by 247Sports,



sat out the entire 2013 season after the early-season concussion. He rested for most of the season, but worked his way back into 7-on-7 drills in practice. Pelini asked Darlington if he wanted to go on visits to other schools, just to test the waters.

“I said ‘Coach, I’m committed to the University of Nebraska. I’m 100 percent committed to y’all,’” Darlington said. “When he called me in the hospital, he said ‘We are committed to you,

just like you are committed to us.’ That says a lot about the people you had there.”

The stutter is almost entirely gone, thanks to speech therapy. The January enrollee should be a full-go for spring practice and a college career, barring any setbacks.

“Doctors have said that with the time away from contact he took advantage of this fall, Zack will be 100 percent and good to go,” Zack’s father and coach Rick Darlington said.

“My doctor said it’s like charging batteries,” Zack Darlington said. “Once your battery is full, it can’t get any fuller.”

Darlington isn’t worrying about his health. His focus has been on learning the offense and delving into the playbook. His aim isn’t just to play football in 2014, it’s to start.

“I think my biggest thing is going to be adjusting to the speed, the talent level,” he said. “That’s what I’ve been working on. I’m on YouTube watching things all the time to pick stuff up.”

Darlington runs with a patient, bruising style that draws comparisons to another religious Florida football product, Tim Tebow, who like Darlington was homeschooled growing up. Darlington sees the comparison, but prefers to compare his play-style to Husker great Eric Crouch.

TANNER FARMER

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • OG - 15 • Illinois - 10

By the time Tanner Farmer arrived in Lincoln for Big Red Weekend in the summer, he was already pretty sure he would end up a Cornhusker.

He loved the school, he loved the team and he loved the coaches. But he wanted to make sure he would be coached the right way.

Farmer wanted a methodical coach, someone who would lay out the facts and the reason. He wanted a guide, not someone who would scream and punish.

He was pretty sure offensive line coach John Garrison fit his mold. After one day at the camp, he knew it for certain.

“Once I went and visited there, they were the best school for me,” Farmer said. “I just felt comfortable there. It’s home. The school is perfect for me.”

The 6-foot-4, 305 pound offensive guard fills a big need for Nebraska, who graduated almost the entire starting offensive line. The four star prospect, according to 247Sports, is one of the top 247 players in the country and stacks up as one of the top 20 offensive guards in the country.

Despite his talent and the immediate need at Nebraska, Farmer plans to redshirt his first



year in Lincoln. He wants the bonus year for academics.

Just like graduating offensive guard Spencer Long, Farmer intends on being a pre-med student at Nebraska and taking school just as seriously as football, if not more.

The extra year would mean a leg up as he prepares to become a surgeon or a pediatrician. If he changes his mind, the extra year could

help him work toward a master’s degree in physical therapy.

“If they need me to play I’ll be ready to play,” Farmer said. “Redshirting is something I have thought about a lot. Just for getting an extra year of education, I would like that.”

Farmer intends on developing his footwork and working on punching and flexibility strength during his redshirt year.

Husker fans got a glimpse at Farmer in the Under Armour All-American Game, where he was regarded as a standout performer.

“It was a great experience,” Farmer said. “I had a lot of great competition there and I got to see where I stand against the other guys.”

“I thought I started off a little slow, but once I got going, I thought I got better.”

Farmer credits some of his talent to his experience on the wrestling mat. Last season, he won the Illinois Class 2A State Championship, going 39-0 for Highland High School.

“It helps your balance and your hand fighting,” Farmer said. “In wrestling, you have to think ahead. You’ve got to be able to do that in football too.”

Although Farmer is a standout wrestler, he said he’ll only play football at Nebraska.

D.J. FOSTER

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • OG - 39 • Nebraska - 2

Nebraska wasted no time trying to get the top recruit in the state.

The Huskers offered Lincoln Southeast offensive lineman D.J. Foster during his sophomore year of high school, the same year his older brother Trey committed to play tight end for the hometown team.

The early bird got the worm. Foster committed alongside five other players during Big Red Weekend in mid-June.

“Being able to say they’re one of the top schools in the nation, that is something I like and can say I will have a chance to be a part of,” Foster said. “Having the relationship part that they had, that’s what really pushed them over the top. They had my brother here.”

Back in his sophomore year, it was now-Husker tight end Sam Cotton and his brother Trey who came to him one day after track and field practice and told him he had a Husker offer. After that, however, his brother stayed mostly hands-off.

“My family there, they did not want to push themselves on me,” Foster said. “They let me choose. It just worked out the best.”

But that’s not to say the thought of playing with his brother never crossed his mind.



“I’ve always been around my brother, we’ve played together so long,” Foster said. “It would be really cool to say you’ve played since you were 7 (years old) with your brother.”

Despite living in Lincoln since he was 8 years old, Foster never really turned into a Nebraska fan until they offered.

He was born in Tuscaloosa, Ala., and grew up rooting for the Crimson Tide. Although he

got early offers from Florida, Georgia, UCLA and handfuls of other schools, he never hung around long enough to see if the Tide would come calling. Instead, he committed to the Huskers, partially to clear up any uncertainty so he could get to work. With an experienced offensive line graduating, the window is open for him to make an immediate impact.

Foster’s high school coach, Ryan Gottula, said his ideal size, physicality and technique could give him a shot right away.

“D.J. is 6-foot-3, 305 and moves really well as an O-lineman,” Gottula said. “He also has a great motor and plays to the whistle.”

Coaches haven’t told Foster if he, like his brother, will redshirt his first year. Although Foster’s goal is to play right away, he wouldn’t mind taking a year to fine-tune skills and get acclimated to Nebraska.

“I may get an opportunity that some other players wouldn’t, there are so many seniors graduating,” Foster said. “I’m going to try and get on everybody’s good side, (but) redshirting has never been something I’ve looked away from – if you take advantage of that year.”

Foster played both offense and defense at Southeast, but plans to play guard at Nebraska.

NICK GATES

247Sports Rankings: National - 243 • OT - 21 • Nevada - 1

Nebraska went all in on Nick Gates and came out a winner. The Bishop Gorman (Nev.) offensive lineman is regarded as one of the best and most versatile linemen in the country. He carries a four star rating and is ranked among the top prospects in the country by 247Sports.

Husker coaches immediately identified Gates as a priority, offering him a scholarship during his junior season.

“I probably have the best relationship with those coaches, so that played into it,” Gates said. “They were in there since Day 1. Nebraska was my third or fourth offer.”

Since then, they’ve remained in constant contact and tasked a large number of committed players with schmoozing up to Gates.

Safety Luke Gifford – regarded as a lead student-recruiter in the class – and fellow-linemen D.J. Foster and Mick Stoltenberg each mentioned Gates as a priority. They talked to him on campus, regularly communicated by text message and bumped elbows whenever possible, including Foster and quarterback Zack Darlington’s time with Gates at the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl in early January.

“Getting to spend a week those guys actually really helped,” he said. “I just got to hang out



with them and become friends with them. That was a big thing too.”

The 6-foot-5, 270-pound offensive tackle had offers from Alabama, Arizona, Oregon, UCLA and Texas A&M, among others. As the season drug on, Gates’ recruiting ranking continued to rise and the offers kept coming in. Gates earned national recognition during the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl with a strong showing, but

held offers from national powers for the entirety of his senior season. He’s regarded as a versatile player who could play all five line positions.

“I’ve seen a lot of the great football players over the years and I’ve not seen a better finisher,” said Tony Sanchez, Gates’ high school coach and coach of the West team of the 2014 U.S. Army All-American Bowl. “He’s a mean son of a gun.”

Gates took his first visit to Nebraska in June for Big Red Weekend, returning again to Lincoln in November to witness the Hail Mary win against Northwestern. He made official visits to Texas A&M, Oregon and Arizona before deciding to cut his finalists down to three schools – Nebraska, Arizona and Texas A&M.

Shortly after the coaches visited Gates’ home on Jan. 21, he began to finalize Nebraska as his favorite. Three days after the in-home visit, Gates announced his commitment via Twitter.

“I just think he felt really comfortable at Nebraska,” Sanchez said.

Most recruiting services list Gates as a tackle, with 247Sports ranking him as the No. 21 player at his position. He is expected to play tackle at Nebraska, with Nebraska’s other two major offensive line commits projected as interior linemen.

LUKE GIFFORD

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • ATH - 120 • Nebraska - 4

At first, Bo Pelini and his staff weren't sure what to do with Luke Gifford. The Lincoln Southeast product, a Husker fan since birth, first talked with coaches during his junior day. They told him they wanted to offer, but they didn't know what position he would play.

The 6-foot-3, 190 pound athlete could line up at tight end, safety, linebacker – any number of positions, they told him. Instead of offering, they told him to wait until summer, when he would likely get an offer.

Frank Solich's Ohio Bobcats offered him on Valentine's Day. One day later, so did North Dakota, then Toledo a week after that. On March 4, he got a note from his coach – he was supposed to call Pelini. Coaches told him “they didn't care where I played at, they just wanted me on the team,” he said.

“When I got an offer from Nebraska, it was a big deal,” Gifford said. “For them to offer early, that showed me a lot.”

One week later, he committed. Coaches have told him they could use him like Nathan Gerry. Depending on how much muscle he adds, he could play linebacker, safety or even tight end. They'll start him off in the secondary.

“During my in-home visit with Coach Pelini



and Coach Cotton and Coach Garrison, we talked about starting at safety and maybe moving down to nickel and dime,” Gifford said. “They talked about using my length.”

Gifford started at safety for three years at Southeast. This season, he also started at quarterback, learning to read coverage and manipulate safeties. It helps seeing the other side of the coin, he said.

Although he struggled offensively early in the season, by the end, he said he was able to toy with defenses more – an experience that can benefit him defensively.

“I do think that playing QB and having the experience of reading coverages and understanding formations and passing game concepts will be very beneficial to him as he moves into a role of just playing DB at Nebraska,” Southeast coach Ryan Guttula said.

Gifford's biggest focus in preparing himself for Nebraska is adding weight. Last year, he weight 190. Now, he's up to 210 and growing.

His personal trainer in Lincoln is trying to help him bulk up. Triple decker soy butter sandwiches – he's allergic to peanut butter – and shakes packed with cottage cheese have become the new normal.

“That was tough because I'm a picky eater, so I had to choke some stuff down,” Gifford said.

Since committing in March – the first player in the 2014 class – Gifford has acted as a chief recruiter for the team. He, along with early-enrollee QB Zack Darlington, texted and talked with commits and targets to try and share information about NU long before his senior season even began.

MONTE HARRISON

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • WR - 52 • Missouri - 7

Monte Harrison could end up being the best recruit in the 2014 class never to make it to campus.

The 6-foot-3, 200 pound wide receiver is a freak athlete. At Lee's Summit West High School in greater Kansas City, Mo., he's a play-making wide out in football, a highlight reel on the basketball court and a superstar on the baseball field.

He's a four-star prospect in football according to 247Sports, ranked as the No. 18 receiver in the country, but there's a chance he never plays a down at Nebraska. His talent in the outfield and at the plate could steal him away from the Huskers.

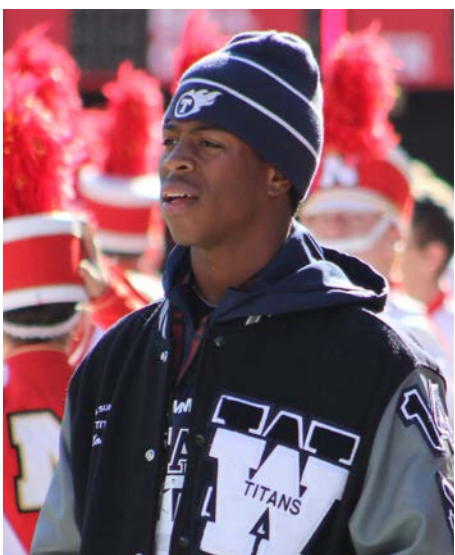
This summer, when Major League Baseball holds its draft, his name will be called early – some say as early as the late first round.

Harrison could choose baseball. But until the draft happens, his plan is to play in college.

The football program offered him a scholarship before any other school, back at the beginning of 2013.

But when he decided to commit, it was the baseball program and coach Darin Erstad who he told first.

“People don't know that I'm a baseball guy



and that I want to play baseball in college,” Harrison said. “Coach Erstad was the No. 1 pick. He's just a great coach. He has the feel for the sport and he's a two-sport player. He knows how that goes. Plus he played the outfield so he knows technique and stuff like that.”

Harrison turned down offers from a few schools in the Midwest, including Indiana, who was ranked as high as No. 3 in some baseball

preseason rankings. Ultimately, the decision came down to the relationship he built with Nebraska coaches and the faith he felt the programs had in him.

“That was very important,” he said. “All the teams have said they wanted me, but at the end of the day Nebraska was always there and loyal to me.”

Harrison has drawn early comparisons to graduating receiver Quincy Enunwa. His physicality blended with his versatility make him a strong candidate to find early playing time in Enunwa's vacated position.

While the allure of a Major League Baseball contract could swing him away from Lincoln, the college experience, a full-ride football scholarship (in lieu of a partial baseball scholarship) and an opportunity to play close to home all offer hope.

“I thought about how I could go far away but when I thought about it again I couldn't do that to my mom,” Harrison said. “I love my mom and I'd love for her to be able to watch my games now, just like she does for my high school.”

Harrison will learn his MLB Draft position on June 5.

GLENN IRONS

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • WR - 210 • Louisiana- 66

Receiver Glenn Irons became the third recruit to commit to Nebraska from New Orleans high school Edna Karr in as many months when he decided in favor of NU in late January.

Teammates Jaevon Walton, a linebacker, and Jariah Tolbert, a receiver, had both picked the Huskers before Irons. As signing day loomed, he surveyed his options.

Utah had offered him a scholarship, but he had no interest in going there. Kent State and McNeese State both showed interest, but when Nebraska came calling, he listened.

He grew up playing football as a kid with current Husker tight end Cethan Carter. Between him, Walton and Tolbert, he would already have a group of friends to make the change easier, but he tried to keep that from factoring into his decision.

"I didn't really talk too much to them about going there just because they're my teammates," Irons said. "I really took time out and decided for myself that it was the right place for me."

Irons is a 5-foot-10, 170 pound receiver rated as a two-star prospect by 247Sports. He didn't garner many offers from major programs, but when Nebraska called, they made



him an enticing offer.

"They told me I had an opportunity to be starting as a freshman if I work hard and if I produce in practice," Irons said.

Whether that happens or not could depend on Irons' return game. The Huskers displayed a big need for quality punt returners last season, finishing near the bottom of the country in yards per punt return. Irons' speed and experience re-

turning kicks and punts could help him find a way onto the field early.

Irons is a sprinter for Edna Karr's track team and registers a 4.48 in the 40-yard dash, he said. He favors a "pick a hole and hit it" mentality on punt and kick returns that should eliminate scampering and emphasize an attack style.

Receivers coach Rich Fisher told Irons he would line up in the slot on offense, occupying the position currently filled by Jamal Turner and Jordan Westerkamp. Because of his speed, Fisher said the Huskers plan to use Irons in the backfield in certain packages as well.

What really sold Irons on Nebraska was the academics. When Irons came to visit Nebraska Jan. 24, coaches showed him the centralized academic centers and detailed all the resources available within proximity of the football facilities.

"The stuff that I learned on my official visit about the academic life – the vicinity of the area, everything is around each other," Irons said. "It makes it easier to do everything."

Irons referred to head coach Bo Pelini as "another father-type figure for me." With teammates joining him in Lincoln and a friend in Cethan Carter waiting, Irons said the 1,000-mile

CHRIS JONES

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • ATH - 54 • Florida - 104

New defensive backs coach Charlton Warren got off to a hot start on the recruiting trail, securing the commitment of Jacksonville, Fla., cornerback Chris Jones just a couple of days after taking the Nebraska job.

The three-star cornerback had been visited by receivers coach Rich Fisher on Jan. 16. Two days later, he took an official visit to Lincoln. Fisher returned to Jacksonville on Jan. 20, this time with head coach Bo Pelini and Warren for an in-home visit where the trio secured Jones' commitment.

"God led me in the right direction, this is my fit, my recruiting is over after this, GO CORNHUSKERS!!!!!!!!!!!" Jones posted to Twitter.

Nebraska wasn't Jones' first love, however. He spent the majority of the year committed to USF before opening up his recruitment. The Huskers were actually Jones' third choice.

Three days after attending the Florida State Seminoles camp in July, he committed to play at USF. Then, as the football season came to a close, he began to get more attention and flipped his commitment to Purdue on Dec. 17, just before the recruiting dead period. It wasn't until after the final recruiting dead period, in



January, that his interest in Nebraska picked up.

When he switched his commitment for the third time, he caught plenty of slack on social media.

"I understand a lot people (are) upset I switched," Jones tweeted on Jan. 21. "At the end of the day I worked hard to get here, God led me that way so I obeyed."

At Nebraska, the 6-foot, 175 pound Jones

will join fellow-recruit Trai Mosley and junior college transfer Byerson Cockrell in competing with Nebraska's existing players for a few open spots in the defensive backfield. The graduation of Ciente Evans and Stanley Jean-Baptiste frees up two spots in the secondary, allowing for players, even as young as Jones, to make an immediate impact.

Jones and his high school coach could not be reached for comment, but Jones did tweet at his followers about his work ethic and tenacity on the football field, saying that although he wasn't selected to be an All-American, he would fight tooth-and-nail to prove himself at Nebraska.

"(I) wasn't selected for any bowl games but you put me up against any one of them 5 star recruits I will compete and go balls to wall and dominate," he tweeted on Jan. 1.

Jones is ranked as the No. 56 athlete in the 2014 class by 247Sports, although all three of his commitments have been to play cornerback.

Jones wore No. 8 for the Sandalwood High School Saints football team and is pictured during his visit to Nebraska wearing a No. 8 jersey, though it's not clear if that will be his jersey number when he arrives in summer.

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JOSH KALU

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • S - 104 • Texas - 152

After visiting Nebraska in September, defensive back recruit Joshua Kalu considered his options. He had 10 offers on the board. He had plenty of time to check out other schools.

But he had no desire to go anywhere else.

"I considered taking other visits," Kalu said. "As time went by, I was like 'What am I waiting for? If this is the school that I wanted to go to, just commit.'"

On Oct. 14, he pulled the trigger and committed to defensive backs coach Terry Joseph and Nebraska. The visit, hosted by Ameer Abdullah, sold him, as did a chat with fellow-commit Trai Mosley. Five days later, Kalu played the game of his life. He snagged 3 interceptions and wrapped up 8 tackles in a 20-0 Alief Taylor (Houston, Texas) win.

Most schools were recruiting him as a safety, a position that normally demands physical play. While Kalu said he has no problems playing physical, he prefers to jump routes than to crush receivers.

"I'm not going to say I'm just a coverage guy, but I'm not just a hitter," Kalu said. "I'm in between. I can go lay out and hit with the best of them ... but why get a big hit when you can put points on the board?"



The 6-foot, 170 pound Kalu is rated as a three-star prospect by 247Sports and is listed just outside the top 100 safeties in the country.

Kalu never wavered when Joseph took a job at Texas A&M. After meeting with new defensive backs coach Charlton Warren, Kalu remained a strong Nebraska commit.

He may stick with his high school position as a safety at Nebraska, but he said coaches told

him he will play multiple spots.

"Mostly it was the nickel position," Kalu said. "I'm going to have to learn all three positions."

Kalu's coach, Jody Jordan, said that shouldn't be an issue. He played safety, cornerback, wide receiver, quarterback and kick and punt returner for Alief Taylor during his career.

"He is a very well-rounded athlete," Jordan said. "His skill set allows him to be successful in a lot of areas. He might start out as a nickel back, but I would bet eventually he will be an everyday defensive player for Nebraska."

Nebraska coach Bo Pelini emphasized communication this season throughout his defense. That's one area where Kalu excels, Jordan said, and it's a way he could find his way onto the field sooner than later.

"He's a great communicator and leader on the field," Jordan said. "Very likeable young man. Coaches, athletes and the student body all love the kid."

Now, it'll just be a matter of finding his role. Kalu's versatility could come in handy, but now he'll have to work on bulking up physically and mastering one position, once he finds out what exactly that will be.

JOE KEELS

247Sports Rankings: National JC - 16 • DT - 5 • Kansas - 4

By all accounts, defensive end Joe Keels should have played at Wisconsin.

He grew up in Kenosha, a two-hour drive from Camp Randall Stadium in Madison. His cousin, Melvin Gordon, is carving up Big Ten defenses as the Badgers' go-to tailback.

The 6-foot-4, 275 pound pass rush specialist committed to play for the Badgers back in October. But after making it up to Madison to see the defense in person, things changed.

They ran a 3-4, but were calling it by a different name. Once Keels saw the defense operate, he felt his 4-3 pass rush technique would be best suited elsewhere.

Enter Nebraska. They compared him – the No. 16 JUCO player according to 247 Sports – to Husker D-end Randy Gregory.

"They wanted me to come in and be an anchor defensive end and make plays right away," Keels said. "They said they looked for a particular guy (last year) and they got Randy. This year, they were looking for a particular guy and they got me. I looked at that as an honor."

Keels left Highland Community College for Lincoln in time for the spring semester. He'll have three years to play two, but expects to play immediately.



"Joe has all the tools to be a big time guy," Keels' junior college coach Ryan Held said. "He needs to improve – like every kid – his base fundamentals at the point of attack and pass rush moves. He has the fast twitch and running ability that you can't teach."

Keels is hoping he'll get to wear the No. 9 jersey vacated by graduating defensive end Jason Ankrah. He's worn it his entire life, and for

a good reason. Before Joe was conceived, his mother had her tubes tied. The surprise baby had doctors worried.

When they discovered Joe had epilepsy – accompanied by frequent seizures – the government offered his mother \$20,000 in exchange for her son, he said. She was told Joe would be brain dead by age 9, if he made it at all.

"I know a lot of people that would've given up," Joe Keels said. "Doctors are supposed to know it all. When they say that and you're not doing the best financially ... a lot of parents would've taken the money and said it was a stillbirth."

Instead, she devoted extra time for caring for him. She lost her job and eventually her home, but she helped Keels heal. By age 9, he hadn't had a seizure in more than a year, and his brain worked just fine. He hasn't had a seizure since. The No. 9 on the back of his uniform – a nod to his supposedF

Now, at Nebraska, Keels will have his chance to turn things around for himself and his family. He's on the radar on the national scene and is trying to make a name for himself so he can reward his mother for her perseverance by earning an NFL contract.

SEDRICK KING

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • WDE - 66 • Florida - 182

Nebraska filled a big position of need with the late commitment of Sedrick King, a defensive end the Huskers flipped from UCF.

The three-star defensive end, who played for Plant City High School near Tampa, Fla., had been committed to UCF since June 8. But when the Huskers entered the fold in January, he reopened his mind.

Other Big Ten schools like Illinois and Wisconsin also contacted King, making a late recruiting push. In total, he held more than 10 offers from major or mid-major schools, including Louisville, Rutgers, West Virginia, Wake Forest and South Florida.

An in-home visit by defensive coordinator John Papuchis and defensive line coach Rick Kaczinski helped convince him to come check out Lincoln. When he visited Nebraska on Jan. 24, he was sold.

"The visit was the best weekend of my life," King said. "It was really cool to see all the facilities, meet the players and talk to the coaches. It was really nice."

While at Nebraska, King chatted with former-Florida high school prospect and current Nebraska defensive tackle Kevin Maurice, who made the transition from Florida to Ne-



braska, more than 1,400 miles from home and had some helpful words of advice.

"I can relate to him like that," King said. "He was telling about Nebraska and how it was just a really good place for a guy from our situation. It really made it easier. It showed me that I can go away from my family because here's a better opportunity."

On Jan. 27, King officially decommitted from UCF and flipped to Nebraska. Compared

to most other recruits, King's recruitment to Nebraska was kept very quiet, with a commitment coming as a surprise to most people looking in from the outside.

In the end, King said Nebraska was simply "a better feel and a better fit."

King flew under the radar for much of the season. His 6-foot-3, 210 pound frame was deemed too slender for a defensive end. Since then, he has reportedly added 40 pounds and measures an inch taller, with his new 6-foot-4, 250 pound build much more suitable for a college defensive end.

The recent one-year campus ban for starting defensive end Avery Moss opens up a spot on Nebraska's defensive line. The Huskers pursued multiple options at defensive end late in the recruiting cycle, with King being one of the top priorities. King said that he recognizes the challenge that Nebraska presents, but he also sees the opportunity that's in front of him.

"Nebraska always has good players all around," he said. "I just feel like I can bring something to the table and really help them out."

King is ranked as the No. 66 weakside defensive end by 247Sports.

TRAI MOSLEY

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • CB - 70 • Texas - 102

When defensive backs coach Terry Joseph decided to leave Nebraska for Texas A&M, cornerback commit Trai Mosley was unsure of what to think. He had offers on the table from Oklahoma and Baylor, both of which came after his June commitment to Nebraska. The three-star cornerback had options.

A little more than a week after Joseph took the job with the Aggies, Nebraska recruiting coordinator and linebackers coach Ross Els came down to visit the 5-foot-10, 171-pound Mosley in his Pflugerville, Texas, home. Five days later, new defensive backs coach Charlton Warren did the same.

"It is a very big relief to meet him," Mosley said at the time. "I feel like that empty spot in my recruiting bar is filled and I can say I'm officially done with my recruitment."

Mosley was impressed with Warren's coaching style. The former-Air Force defensive backs coach is a "hands on and fundamental" coach, Mosley said, just like his coach at Hendrickson High School. Head coach Bo Pelini's specialization in coaching secondary and his track record for producing elite defensive backs also intrigued Mosley. That's one of the largest reasons he stayed faithful to Nebraska even as



major schools closer to home began offering scholarships during his senior season, trying to sway his commitment.

Mosley was one of the earliest commits to Nebraska's 2014 class, committing June 14, right before Big Red Weekend in Lincoln. Four other players committed to Nebraska within 24 hours of Mosley. After committing, fellow future-Huskers like safety Luke Gifford, quar-

terback Zack Darlington, offensive guard D.J. Foster and others kept up with him in a group text message as a way of forming a bond when they weren't together in Lincoln.

Mosley's official visit to Lincoln took place Nov. 16, just a few weeks after he took an unofficial visit to Oklahoma and met with OU coaches in his home. Although the Huskers fell 41-28 to Michigan State during his visit, he was able to reunite with a handful of fellow-Husker pledges who visited Lincoln back during Big Red Weekend and got a second glimpse at the school he first committed to five months earlier.

Gifford, Darlington, receiver Demomay Pierson-El and others were all on hand, bumping elbows and hanging out on the Husker sideline. The relationship the early commits formed helped Mosley stay strong in his commitment to Nebraska.

"I am proud of the choice I made and my family is as well," Mosley said.

Mosley is joined by fellow-cornback Chris Jones in the 2014 class. Jones was committed to USF before Warren took over as NU's new defensive backs coach. The Jacksonville, Fla., product jumped aboard the class on Jan. 20, one day before Warren came to see Mosley.

PEYTON NEWELL

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • DT - 21 • Kansas - 2

When Nebraska offered Peyton Newell a scholarship, he didn't think much of it. Even though he lived just two hours away in Hiawatha, Kan., Newell was a Kansas and Kansas State fan with little care for Nebraska football – until his dad made him go up to Lincoln.

"My dad told me I should consider taking a trip up there just because of the history and everything it had to offer," said Newell, who visited for Big Red Weekend three years ago. "I fell in love with the place right when I walked in there."

As Newell began to look harder at Nebraska, something felt right.

"The first game I went to was the Michigan night game," Newell said. "The atmosphere there was amazing."

Players, like Josh Banderas and Nathan Gerry, began to talk to him about what they loved about NU. Conversations with defensive line coach Rick Kaczinski lasted an hour, when other coaches could only keep up conversation for 15 minutes or so. It became clear when he made other visits. He went to check out South Carolina, Georgia, USC and even Kansas and KSU.

"The one thing they all had in common was that I compared all those schools to Nebraska," Newell said. "So it was kind of a no-brainer."



Newell returned for Big Red Weekend before his senior year. The 6-foot-3, 278-pound defensive lineman sat down with the defensive staff – surrounded by his family and his head coach – and committed.

"Once I told them, they all jumped up to their feet," Newell said. "When they did that, I was surprised, but it showed me how much I meant to the program."

Newell tried to keep his commitment secret for another two months. On Aug. 30, as teammates bet future McDonald's lunches, wagering on which school he would pick, he announced his intentions in a press conference at his school, donning a Nebraska flat-billed hat.

After committing, Newell tried to help out as a recruiter along with teammates like Luke Gifford and Zack Darlington. Since he's just a short drive from Lincoln, he's been on campus multiple times to talk with recruits.

"When I recruit, I don't tell them to go to Nebraska, I just tell them what they have to offer," Newell said. "I'm very up-front with them. I just tell them what separates Nebraska from everyone else."

When Newell joins NU in the summer, he'll likely begin working as a defensive tackle after playing defensive end, defensive tackle and tight end in high school. Kaczinski told him he wants Newell to play as a speed defensive tackle at NU.

"The plan right now is playing my freshman year," Newell said. "It's going to kind of depend on fall camp and how that goes."

After increasing his season total by 13 tackles for loss from last season, Newell ended his senior year ranked No. 21 at DT in the country by 247Sports.

DEMOMAY PIERSON-EL

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • ATH - 124 • Virginia - 44

Don't sell Demomay Pierson-El short. Sure, he's only 5-foot-9 and 170 pounds, but the future-Husker wide receiver more than makes up for it. The 100-meter track star for West Potomac High School in Alexandria, Va., registers a 4.5 40-yard dash and hits a 38-inch vertical.

"My speed, my strength and my determination (help me) to get other things done," Pierson-El said. "You'll look at me and say you're second-guessing. I really want to beat the odds and prove people wrong. If you can play, then why do you have to be 6-foot-1 or why do you have to be a special type? If you can play, you can flat out play. That really angers me."

Pierson-El started out as a receiver in coach Jeremiah Davis' system. Davis has moved him around to running back and has played him at multiple spots on defense. This season, he filled in at quarterback when the team's starter suffered an injury.

He finished this season with 2,200 all-purpose yards, adding an interception for a touchdown and a kickoff return for a touchdown. He even served as the team's punter.

"That just tells you what type of athlete he is," Davis said. "... Those kind of guys come along once in a lifetime."



Davis sent off Pierson-El's tape a few months before the 2013 season. NU responded less than 24 hours later, interested in him as a receiver.

"Nebraska people called me the next day," Davis said. "No coach, I don't care who you are, they don't call you the next day."

Shortly after reaching out to Pierson-El via Facebook, defensive coordinator John Papuchis flew out to his high school to offer him a schol-

arship.

Papuchis put him in contact with receivers coach Rich Fisher, who said NU would like to use him like current-Husker Jamal Turner. Early in his career, Pierson-El would likely return punts or kicks in addition to learning how to play from the slot. Pierson-El joined a mass of potential recruits in summer 2013 at Big Red Weekend – his first chance to check out the campus. After seeing Lincoln in person, he committed.

"Once I saw it, I fell in love with it and I wanted to be a part of it," he said. "I had to see it for myself."

Since committing, Pierson-El finished out his final football season at West Potomac, then intended on focusing on preparing for his football career, but Papuchis encouraged him to play basketball during his senior season.

Pierson-El said he wanted to work on getting stronger, developing his mechanics and getting in and out of breaks.

When recruiting him, some coaches questioned his catching ability, including a recruiter from Wake Forest, Davis remembers. Davis laughed at the coach and said that among all of Pierson-El's qualities, his hands – not his speed – are his best trait.

LARENZO STEWART

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • APB - 13 • Texas - 75

Nebraska may have found its next speedster. Lorenzo Stewart, a 5-foot-6, 170 pound all-purpose back from Spring, Texas, got his first visit from Nebraska while running track.

Recruiting coordinator Ross Els came to watch him run at track practice in spring 2013. A few months later, in May, he would place fifth in the Texas 5A 100-meter dash at the state track meet with a time of 10.56 on a bum ankle. His sub-4.40 40-yard dash time caught Nebraska's attention. A few weeks after Els visited, Nebraska sent running backs coach Ron Brown and offer him a scholarship.

At first, Stewart wasn't sure what to think. "I didn't really know too much about Nebraska," Stewart said. "When they offered me, I was like 'Who is Nebraska? I've never heard of Nebraska.'"

He had his eye on Baylor instead. He would get to stay closer to home and still play in a high-speed offense. But as time wore on, Baylor coaches only called every so often, but Nebraska coaches called regularly. They asked about more than football. Stewart felt like more than a player in Nebraska's eyes.

"The (Baylor) coaches, they didn't really keep in touch with me like Nebraska did,"



Stewart said. "Coach Brown would call me every single time he had a chance. He cared more than just football-wise. He cared about me as a person."

On the Fourth of July, as he hung around with his friends, he got an itch to commit to Nebraska. He texted his high school coach first, then he called Brown and made it official.

Brown had been telling Stewart how they

planned to use him as an all-purpose back, utilizing his speed on punt and kick returns.

"They said they're going to use me how they use Ameer (Abdullah)," Stewart said.

Stewart committed to Nebraska before even visiting campus. When he finally visited on Nov. 29, he reaffirmed his decision. Although Stewart stands only 5-foot-6, he uses his height to his advantage. Early in his high school career, his offensive linemen all stood around 6-foot-3 or 6-foot-4, he said. He could hide from linebackers and burst through holes, already nearing top speed by the time they identified him.

"I'm small but I'm still tough enough to run up the hole and I can go against some linebackers," Stewart said.

When Stewart arrives in Lincoln this summer, he intends on connecting with track and field coach Gary Pepin. He plans on running the 100-meter dash and the 4x100-meter relay in college, if he can make the schedule work with football.

Stewart said he talked with coaches about potentially juggling track and football, and Brown has given him the green light to give it a shot. The only remaining hurdle for Stewart is qualifying academically.

MICK STOLTENBERG

247Sports Rankings: National - N/R • SDE - 52 • Nebraska - 3

In-state lineman Mick Stoltenberg was robbed of his senior season when he tore up his knee. A torn meniscus and articular cartilage damage cost him the chance to make a lasting statement and to cement his high school legacy. Thankfully, he already had a Husker offer firmly in hand.

A strong showing at the Rivals Camp Series in St. Louis after spring football near the end of his junior year vaulted Stoltenberg into the spotlight. He was named one of the top performers at the camp.

"It was huge," Stoltenberg said. "I really hadn't been recruited at all (before that)."

The 6-foot-5, 255-pound Gretna High School prospect added almost 20 pounds that spring before showing up at Nebraska's summer camp. There, coaches took notice, quickly offering him a scholarship.

"I was pretty caught off-guard to be honest," Stoltenberg said. "I didn't think the offer would come that early in the game or at all."

He told coach Bo Pelini he wanted to talk to his family and other coaches before he officially committed, but it didn't take long.

"Growing up in Nebraska, that's a dream come true," he said.



Then came his nightmare.

Stoltenberg came off the field in a fourth quarter blowout win at Blair, nursing what appeared to be a torn ACL in the team's second game of the season.

Although the ACL wasn't torn, the torn meniscus would end his season. Instead of terrorizing quarterbacks in Nebraska's Class B, he was rehabbing after surgery.

Now, doctors say his knee "looks like it didn't even have surgery on it," he said. He should be full-go by March.

Even so, he's likely to redshirt – partly because of his rehab and partly because Nebraska's coaches haven't decided what to do with him yet.

At Gretna, Stoltenberg played on both sides of the ball. Nebraska's coaches have toyed with the idea of playing him on the defensive line, the offensive line and at tight end.

"Mick will have to find his place in collage as far as a position is concerned," Stoltenberg's high school coach Chad Jepsen said. "He is capable of playing in a few different positions, which is a good problem to have."

"... There is no doubt that Mick has the physical skills and mental ability to play at the Division I level. He will do well."

Stoltenberg would prefer to play defensive end, where he projects as a strongside end, but coaches have told him they may use him as a blocking tight end early in his career.

"They're not 100 percent sure yet," he said. "... I would like to play d-end, but if there's a way I can contribute faster or more effectively, I would definitely do that."

JARIAH TOLBERT

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • WR - 197 • Louisiana - 61

Jariah Tolbert committed to play wide receiver for Nebraska before even checking out campus. He already had one teammate committed to Nebraska in linebacker Jaevon Walton. Just a few days after Tolbert committed, teammate and fellow-receiver Glenn Irons would do the same.

Although Tolbert wasn't offered a scholarship until late, coaches had been around his New Orleans high school, Edna Karr, recruiting Walton earlier in the season. He was familiar with the program and what it could offer him.

"We've just all got a good communication and good connection with the coaches," Tolbert said. "It's just the place to be."

On Jan. 24, Tolbert made his first visit to the Midwest, joined by Irons. The two posed for a picture with Tolbert wearing a No. 9 Nebraska jersey and Irons wearing No. 1. Two days later, Irons joined him in the 2014 class.

Tolbert's visit to Lincoln locked in his commitment. The relationship he formed with the coaching staff gave him a good enough feeling to commit, but seeing Lincoln in person assured him that he was making the right decision.

"I didn't really know what to expect," Tolbert said. "The fan base up there is strong, I know that. It's good support. I feel like I'll be able to be



successful on and off the field."

Tight end Cethan Carter, a fellow New Orleans product, hosted his visit. Tolbert said his time with Carter and other players showed him that he'll fit in well at Nebraska.

"I like the community up there, it was fun being around the players up there," he said.

Receivers coach Rich Fisher told Tolbert that with the right work ethic and production in prac-

tice, he could play early. His 6-foot-3, 185-pound frame makes him an enticing specimen split out wide.

"I'm a physical tall receiver, I want to be a deep threat and a red zone threat for the team," Tolbert said.

Before he arrives in Lincoln in June, Tolbert wants to add muscle and keep increasing speed as he prepares to transition to major college football. "Getting up to college speed will be one thing I'll need to work on and recognizing coverages, mentally," Tolbert said. "Coaches will help me with techniques when I get up there, but I'm working on the mental game."

Tolbert is a three-star prospect by 247Sports and received offers from Utah, Tulane, Kent State, Texas Southern and Louisiana-Monroe, plus interest from schools like Missouri and Ole Miss. His head coach Nathaniel Jones, who previously coached as an assistant on Larry Coker's staff at UTSA, told him to make his decision based on himself – to tune out everyone else.

Ultimately, when Tolbert focused on what he wanted out of his future school, he fell in love with Nebraska and the ability to play early. He said he felt like he fit in well with the system and has a chance to create something special.

JAEVON WALTON

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • ILB - 44 • Louisiana - 42

Linebacker Jaevon Walton could be considered a trendsetter. Walton committed to Nebraska back in November, three weeks after the Huskers offered him a scholarship. When he flipped from Louisiana-Lafayette, he was the only player from Edna Karr Magnet School headed to Lincoln. Since then, two more have followed in his footsteps.

"I love the place," he recalled telling teammates. "It's going to be a nice place for you like it was for me."

Shortly after his visit, a pair of teammates in receivers Jariah Tolbert and Glenn Irons both signed to play with the Huskers. They all felt like they belonged, Walton said. Between the three of them and fellow New Orleans native Cethan Carter, a sophomore tight end at Nebraska who Walton knows from back home, Nebraska's coaches stressed these connections.

"They just kept preaching about the family atmosphere," Walton said. "It's so far away from home but it's so much like home. I felt and I think they felt it too."

Walton isn't worried about adjusting to Lincoln. He's used to moving around. All four years of high school, he moved and joined a new team.

After his sophomore year, that move led him



to Tuscaloosa, Ala., where his father coaches.

Walton's father is former Alabama All-American and Cincinnati Bengals defensive end John Copeland, who coaches at Tuscaloosa Academy. Copeland's son doesn't have quite the size as his father – standing 6-foot and weighing 230 compared to his father's 6-foot-3, 285-pound playing weight – but he has the smarts, he says.

"I think my strengths are my ability to read

and being very instinctive and being able to pass cover," Walton said. "... (my father) said to always be a student of the game."

Walton played under his father during his freshman and junior years in Tuscaloosa, returning to his family in New Orleans his senior year.

"It was time for me to come home," Walton said.

Had Alabama offered him a scholarship to follow in his father's footsteps, Walton said he would have accepted. But when NU offered, Copeland encouraged his son to blaze his own trail and make his own decision. During his senior season, Walton earned Louisiana Sports Writers Association First Team 4A All-State Honors, helping lead his team to a 13-1 record and a berth in the state championship game. Recruiting site 247Sports ranked him as a high two-star prospect, though many services have him ranked around No. 50 at inside linebacker in the country.

NU coaches told Walton he could be used as an inside or an outside linebacker, depending on where the greatest need is. As he prepares for Nebraska, Walton is focused on bulking up while sharpening his speed to adapt to Big Ten play.

"You've always got to be bigger and faster," Walton said.

MIKALE WILBON

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • RB - 18 • Illinois - 12

Four-star running back Mikale Wilbon was fully committed to Vanderbilt.

Coach James Franklin had won over Wilbon early in the recruiting process, securing a commitment in late April. But on Jan. 11, Franklin left for Penn State, thrusting Wilbon into a state of unknown.

"Before coach Franklin left, it was going to be Vanderbilt all the way," Wilbon said. "He's a high-energy guy. He developed his players. He sent multiple people to the NFL.

"I wanted him to coach me because he has a plan for me."

The same day Franklin took the Nittany Lions coaching job, Wilbon officially decommitted. Offers flooded back in, including Nebraska, who kept in contact with Wilbon all year. Other schools like Missouri, Georgia Tech, Miami, Tennessee, Northern Illinois, Iowa State, Syracuse and Penn State came calling.

The 5-foot-9, 195 pound Wilbon considered following Franklin to Penn State.

"Vanderbilt, Nebraska, Penn State and Missouri – I just wanted to take my official visits there," Wilbon said. "But when I took my official visit to Nebraska, I didn't want to take any others."



The coaches and players were honest and up front, he said. They weren't trying to persuade him to commit. Seeing the dorms and the athletic facilities wowed him. He was sold, but he had to show his parents.

Since they couldn't make it out to see Nebraska until spring football, Wilbon asked head coach Bo Pelini and running backs coach Ron Brown to come visit with his parents in Chicago to show them what he saw on his visit.

As they sat and chatted, Wilbon got up to speak.

"I was just telling them I appreciate the opportunity and I appreciate them coming to my house and I wanted to commit to Nebraska," Wilbon said. "They were standing up and jumping, it was a cool moment."

When Wilbon arrives in the summer, he should be freshly healed from a partial ACL tear he suffered in November. He hasn't discussed the possibility of redshirting with coaches yet, but isn't opposed to the idea, saying he could benefit from a year to adjust to college both academically and physically.

On the field, Wilbon spent most of his senior season before his injury working to improve his pass protection skills. He referred to himself as an all-around back with the ability to catch passes, make people miss and drive through tacklers.

Michael Boehm, a longtime assistant and new head coach at Wilbon's high school, said Wilbon has the best of both worlds with his combination of speed and power. He said his most noteworthy asset, however, is his leadership.

DEANDRE WILLIS

247Sports Rankings: National - N/A • WDE - 85 • Alabama - 54

DeAndre Willis is more interested in sacking quarterbacks than he is scoring touchdowns.

The 6-foot-3, 262 pound Alabama-native lines up as a defensive end and as a tight end. Many schools wanted him to catch passes, but that's not how he envisions his future.

"It's crazy. Playing on defense is different than playing on offense," Willis said. "You can just take your anger out on somebody. Hitting a quarterback, that's my main target."

Willis began his recruiting early, unofficially visiting Southern Miss back in September 2012. His first scholarship offers came after attending Junior Days at LSU and Auburn in February 2013, but he didn't make his selection until the final week of recruiting. He sat on offers from Clemson, Ole Miss and Vanderbilt and was leaning toward heading to Clemson.

"I know the coaches really well," Willis said. "Every time I call them, we can talk about everything. But I just wanted to wait some more."

"I was just looking for the right fit for me. Every school isn't for everybody."

While Willis deliberated his future school, Clemson moved on. Clemson coaches pursued other players and told him they had to find someone else and weren't going to wait on him



any longer, he said.

In early January, Nebraska entered the fold. Willis decided to come visit after speaking with defensive coordinator John Papuchis.

During the final weekend of the recruiting cycle, Willis came to Lincoln and visited with players and coaches. He was wowed by Nebraska's facilities.

"What can you ask for more?" Willis said.

"Oh my God, it was like you're in heaven. That's what really drove it home for me."

Willis talked to his mother after the visit and prayed, he said. He told her how he loved the facilities, but also pointed out how impressive he found Nebraska's academics and amenities, like tutoring. The next morning, while at breakfast in Lincoln, he committed.

Once he arrives in the summer, Willis plans on working as a defensive end. In 2013, he finished his senior season at Central High School of Clay County with nine sacks.

"I'm a pass rusher, that's what I love doing," Willis said. "God almighty, that's my main goal, that's what I love to do."

Willis joins Junior College defensive lineman Joe Keels and incoming freshmen Peyton Newell, Mick Stoltenberg and Sedrick King as players who all have an opportunity to play early on a defensive line that is still in search of a defensive end to replace Avery Moss and a second playmaker at defensive tackle opposite Vincent Valentine. Recruiting service 247Sports ranks Willis as a high two-star prospect, with some recruiting services listing him as a three-star. He ranks No. 85 among all weakside defensive ends by 247Sports.

Huskers already are off to a fast start with Class of 2015 recruiting prospects

BY MICHAEL BRUNTZ

WITH THE 2014 RECRUITING CLASS signed and locked up, it seems like a natural time to take a look forward at 2015 right?

Unfortunately, that's not the way recruiting works these days. Nebraska's coaching staff has already gotten a head start on next year's class, hosting a successful junior day on Feb. 1 that netted four talented commitments for next year's class. As of this writing, in fact, Nebraska had the highest-rated 2015 recruiting class in the Big Ten for next season.

Let's take a quick look at who Nebraska has already secured commitments from:

Kendall Bussey, RB, Newman High School

Bussey was Nebraska's first commitment of the 2015 class, pledging early in Nebraska's junior day. The New Orleans running back had plenty of connections to the program. He grew up friends with 2014 Nebraska recruit Glenn Irons, and knows 2013 tight end Cethan Carter, who has been big for Nebraska's recruiting in Louisiana. Bussey is a big get, and will likely receive more attention on the recruiting trail — he picked up an offer from Missouri after returning home from Nebraska. Bussey's father played at Colorado with Nebraska wide receivers coach Rich Fisher, and fits well into the multiple-spread style of offense that Nebraska runs.

Eric Lee, CB, Valor Christian High School

Getting Lee is a huge coup for Nebraska. A Top247 player, and the No. 137 recruit in the country for 2015, the 6-foot, 175-pound Lee is the kind of physical defender Nebraska covets for its secondary. Lee had plenty of connections to Nebraska. His father is an alum, and Lee lived in Lincoln for a couple years growing up. While in Lincoln, as a youngster, Lee became friends with 2013 offensive line commit D.J. Foster and Foster's family. Lee visited for Nebraska's spring game last year, then returned for a one-day summer session where he earned a scholarship offer. Lee's commitment is even bigger because the corner plans to enroll early next January and be in Lincoln for spring football next year. Expect Lee to get even better, as he is coached in Denver by former NFL standout Brian Dawkins.

Avery Anderson, CB, Pine Creek High School

Anderson visited Nebraska for the spring game last year, but committed to Arizona State a few weeks later. New defensive back coach Charlton Warren passed through Colorado during the visit period and offered Anderson a scholarship. Anderson is good friends with Lee, and he too trains with Dawkins in the Denver area. Anderson returned to Lincoln for the junior day with Lee and decided to flip his commitment from Arizona State to Nebraska. A 4-star cornerback according to the 247Sports



There is another

class to fill, and

more talented

athletes to sign.

But with less than

a year until the

2015 class signs,

Nebraska is off to

a good start.

Composite, Anderson, like Lee, is an early enrollee and will be on campus next spring.

Christian Gaylord, OT, Baldwin High School

Gaylord has long been on Nebraska's recruiting radar. The 6-foot-6, 275-pound offensive tackle visited Nebraska last spring for the Red-White game, and later attended a Nebraska camp where he worked out in a small group with 2014 commits Nick Gates and Tanner Farmer. Gaylord picked up a Nebraska offer when he visited unofficially for the Iowa game. The offensive tackle continued to pick up regional interest and offers — he had offers from Missouri and Oklahoma State among others — but decided to commit while on his junior day visit. He made his pledge public a few days after committing and gave Nebraska a big cornerstone to build on in its offensive line class.

The 500-mile radius around Lincoln — roughly Denver to Chicago and Minneapolis to the Texas border — is a bit of a buzzword when it comes to recruiting at Nebraska. The 2015 recruiting class, though, holds some interesting prospects in the area around Nebraska. Omaha North offensive lineman Michael Decker and twin defensive linemen Khalil and Carlos Davis from the Kansas City area already hold Nebraska offers and attended junior day at Nebraska as well. With recruiting, there is little time for Nebraska coaches to celebrate and dwell on past successes. There is another class to fill, and more talented athletes to sign.

But with less than a year until the 2015 class signs, Nebraska is off to a good start. ” **N**

*Read daily Husker reports from
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D.J. Foster and Luke Gifford smile during a signing ceremony at Lincoln Southeast on Feb. 6.



Team Players

Gifford, Darlington, Foster helped recruit classmates

STORY BY CHRIS PETERS | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BRUNTZ

There's only so much a coach can do to sell an 18-year old kid on joining his program. At a certain point, a recruit just needs a buddy.

When Nebraska's coaches back off and let a recruit breathe for a bit, they send in a commit to talk to him.

Last year, it was Josh Banderas and Nathan Gerry, early commits to the 2013 class. They would text other targets and let them know about their experience, about what they liked at Nebraska.

This year, the responsibility was tasked to Lincoln Southeast athlete Luke Gifford, who like Gerry could play safety or linebacker for Nebraska.

"The coaches definitely talked to me about it," Gifford said. "Right when I committed, that was a big thing they wanted me to do. I really was welcoming that."

After Gifford committed in March 2013, he started connecting with other recruits

coaches were looking at. He modeled his approach after what he saw Banderas do the previous year.

Sometimes, that meant sending text messages, some as simple as a "Hi." Other times, it meant talking to them about Lincoln and about the university or reminding them why they were important to the team while they were on campus for a visit.

"I would just talk to them and kind of show them around," Gifford said. "I've lived here my whole life. I always tell them that it's not what people make it sound like. It's not just in the middle of a cornfield."

They key is to not be overbearing, he said. The players get enough pressure and attention from coaches. There's a delicate balance to figuring out how much attention is too much.

"You don't want to bombard them," Gifford said. "It's their time. You do as much as you can, but you've got to let them do what they want to do."

One of Gifford's earliest recruits was

quarterback Zack Darlington. On Darlington's unofficial visit – when Gifford was still the lone commit in the class – Gifford texted him "Welcome to the family."

Once Darlington pulled the trigger and committed during the summer, Nebraska's coaches recruited him to help out as well.

"The coaches kind of joke and call us recruiting coordinators," Darlington said.

Gifford and Darlington maintain a group message with now-Husker commits like D.J. Foster, Trai Mosley and Peyton Newell.

"We all keep in contact," Darlington said. "It was fun during the season talking about how those guys were doing."

Darlington was able to bump elbows with Foster at the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl, where he took the opportunity to talk with Husker targets like Nick Gates, who eventually committed to Nebraska.

"Zack Darlington has done a great job with that stuff," Gifford said. "I feel like every time I talk to him, he just got done

D.J. Foster and Luke Gifford reenact signing their national letters of intent before classmates at Lincoln Southeast on Feb. 6 due to snow canceling classes on signing day.



talking with another guy.”

The player recruiting model works for some guys, but others would rather stay hands-off. Under Armour All-American Tanner Farmer, a Husker pledge at offensive guard, said he didn’t spend his time at the All-American Game trying to sway people to the school.

For him, it’s about letting the recruit choose for themselves with as little added pressure as possible.

Fellow lineman Foster was in between the two at first. A teammate of Gifford and a friend of Banderas, Foster initially didn’t get involved much in player recruiting. He felt like he should let the recruit reach their own conclusion.

But late in the process, he began showing more recruits around town. He played an instrumental role in developing a family feel for offensive line recruits, helping lead recruits like Gates to Lincoln. After going through the recruiting process, Foster said he saw a need to make recruits feel like they have a friend at the place they could wind up playing four or five years.

“Having someone who is going through it, it definitely changes the playing field,” Foster said.

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**ABDULLAH ANNOUNCES HE'S
BACK FOR ONE MORE SEASON**

Ameer Abdullah carries the ball against
Minnesota.

2MinuteDrill

By Chris Peters

Ahman Green has never met Ameer Abdullah, but he knows what it's like to be in his shoes.

After a stellar three-year career at Nebraska from 1995-97, Green was considered one of the top running backs in the country. Scouts told him he would go in the late first round of the NFL Draft.

Some people told him to turn pro. The money, the fame, all of that was right around the corner. Others told him to finish his degree, to shoot for another championship.

"You have to phase all that out," Green said.

In 2013, Abdullah's numbers rivaled Green's. Abdullah's 1,568 rushing yards were the most since Green's final season in 1997.

Scouts told him he would go high, just like they told Green. Somewhere "around that ballpark" of the first or second round, Abdullah said.

After the Gator Bowl win against Georgia, Abdullah began to deliberate. He processed the positives – his dream of playing in the NFL, a life-altering paycheck, a chance to leave on an individual high note. He tried to balance out the negatives – giving up a free year of school, the craving of a championship, the chance at a Heisman Trophy.

Older brother Muhammad, an attorney in Birmingham, Ala., talked him through the decision.

They talked about the average lifespan of an NFL running back – only a few years – and deliberated the costs and benefits of returning for another year.

"He's very wise. He knows a lot about life," Abdullah said. "He's been through just about every situation you could be in.

"I talked to him a lot. He gave me a lot of comfort in coming back or in leaving."

Ultimately, it came down to tradition. Every single one of his eight siblings has obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

"For our family, that's a huge deal," Abdullah said. "Not a lot of people can say we've got nine college graduates in my family, especially an African-American family. That's huge."

On Jan. 9, Abdullah announced he would return for his senior season. He would be on track to graduate in December with a degree in history and a minor in education. Had he declared early, he would have only been a few credits shy of his degree.

"But who wants to come back to school after you leave school?" he said. "Nobody wants to do that."

Back in 1998, when Green was looking back on his three years in school, he was OK with returning for school later.

He promised his parents he would get his degree back when he signed his letter of intent. In the NFL offseason, he enrolled in online classes and eventually earned his degree while playing for the Packers.

"From my rookie year until about 2003, I was either taking online classes or on campus taking classes," Green said.

When Green compares his decision-making process to Abdullah's, one thing stands out.

"I had two national titles under my belt," he said.

In three seasons, Green's Huskers won two conference and national championships. Abdullah has only appeared in one conference championship as a player – a 70-31 defeat at the hands of Wisconsin.

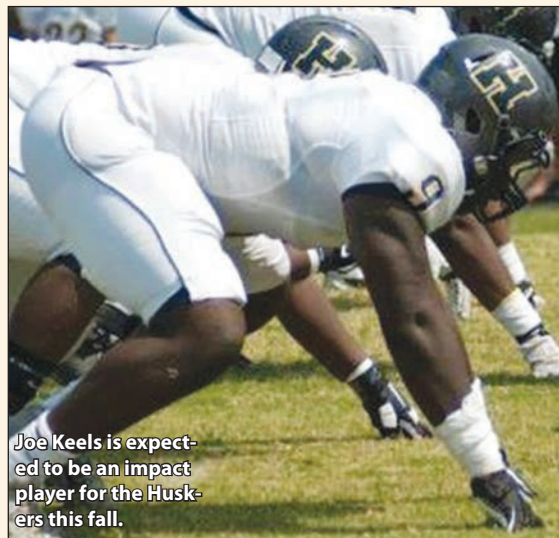
While obtaining his degree was Abdullah's main off-the-field reason for returning, obtaining a championship was his main off-the-field reason.

"I really want to win the championship, not only for our teammates, but for this program," Abdullah said. "We're really deserving."

Abdullah has a handful of other goals to accomplish in his senior season, too, but prefers to keep them to himself. He did mention improving ball security as a primary concern, with a trip to New York City as a Heisman

HI'S TOP 5

INSTANT-IMPACT RECRUITS IN THE CLASS OF 2014



Joe Keels is expected to be an impact player for the Huskers this fall.

- 1 JOE KEELS**
Defensive End – Junior
- 2 NICK GATES**
Offensive Tackle – Freshman
- 3 TANNER FARMER**
Offensive Guard – Freshman
- 4 BYERSON COCKRELL**
Defensive Back – Junior
- 5 PEYTON NEWELL**
Defensive Tackle – Freshman

Nebraska's 2014 recruiting class is full of hybrid-type players and gifted athletes, many of which could turn into something special with the right nurturing. Then there are the players who are ready to go from the day they step on campus. This list of five represents Nebraska's most promising immediate-impact players.

2MinuteDrill

Trophy finalist still a hopeful dream.

Green realizes he could have had a shot at a Heisman and another national title if he had returned in 1998. But he refused to let his mind focus on what could have been.

"I (thought about it) for a little bit, but you've got to turn the page," Green said. "If I really had thought about it, it would have been a coulda, woulda, shoulda."

"It would have been a great year for me, but who knows."

For Abdullah, shutting out the "coulda, woulda, shoulda" of a rookie year in the NFL will be crucial. He's seen NFL prospects get complacent after returning for another year. It's his goal to avoid a senior slump.

Green thinks that shouldn't be too hard for Abdullah. He's seen him grow year after year and he said Abdullah has what it takes to make it in the NFL.

"He's just got to keep focusing on what he's been focusing on," Green said. "Whatever he's been doing, he's been doing it right."

Ahman Green carries the ball against Missouri in 1996.



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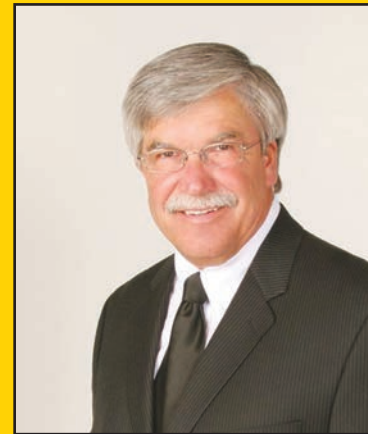
Real Estate Agent
Home Real Estate Pine Lake
7211 S. 27th St
Lincoln, NE 68512
402-560-1173 (C)
402-436-3232 (O)
dennis@slamahomes.com
<http://www.slamahomes.com>

MATT ANKERSON



Real Estate Agent
Home Real Estate Pine Lake
7211 S. 27th St
Lincoln, NE 68512
402-430-2455 (C)
402-436-3232 (O)
matt.ankerson@homerealestate.com
www.homerealestate.com/mattankerson

JOHN FINK



Real Estate Agent
Home Real Estate North
5901 N 27th St
Lincoln, NE 68512
402-429-9598 (C)
402-323-8794 (O)
john.fink@homerealestate.com
www.homerealestate.com/johnfink



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Gipson excels on the track for Husker track team



SOME ATHLETES STRUGGLE WITH NERVES THEIR ENTIRE CAREERS. THEY FREEZE UP, LOSE CONTROL, AND CRUMBLE IN THE SPOTLIGHT TIME AFTER TIME. THAT'S NOT THE CASE FOR HUSKER

SPRINTER LEVI GIPSON. IN FACT, HIS PREDICAMENT IS QUITE THE OPPOSITE.

"Honestly, I try to get nervous because I don't get nervous anymore," he said. "I don't want to think nothing of it, so I know if I get a little nervous, it means I'm in the moment and can put some emphasis on the race."

Gipson said a few nerves get his adrenaline pumping and help him focus on the task at hand. He's usually loose before a race, joking around with teammates, but when it comes down to it, he actually wants a few butterflies in his stomach.

Gipson did quite well drumming up the necessary nerves a year ago, helping break the Nebraska indoor 4x400 meter relay record as a freshman.

"We just came and competed," Gipson said of the team. "Most people see the 400 and they think it is a painful race. It's painful, but we like to go out there and compete. We are teammates, and we don't want to let each other down. We know we are going to work hard for each other."

Gipson can run anything from the 200 to the 800, but he prefers the 400, and more specifically the 4x400 relay, because it's a team race. In high school at Lincoln Christian, he played football and basketball, where he enjoyed the all-for-one attitude.

"Track's and individual sport, but when you can put that team aspect in there, it's really cool," he said. "These are the people that you've been going to practice with every day. You are sweating and go-

ing through grueling practices together, and to see that pay off is really sweet."

The team aspect helped Gipson make the transition to college as well. Only a freshman last year, the sprinter was behind the curve in terms of experience and health. He suffered a sports hernia his senior year of high school that lingered into college but overcame it.

"The week before school started in college, I went down to St. Louis and got a surgery," Gipson said. "I was out for like 6-8 weeks. I wasn't completely out, but I wasn't comfortable and stuff."

Gipson didn't worry about that though. He just kept his nose to the grindstone, letting the coaches figure out what to do with him.

"I knew right when I got hurt it was going to be a long process," the sprinter said. "I didn't really think I was going to redshirt, but actually, I didn't even know. I was just kind of going about it leaving it up to the coaches. I always knew it was a possibility."

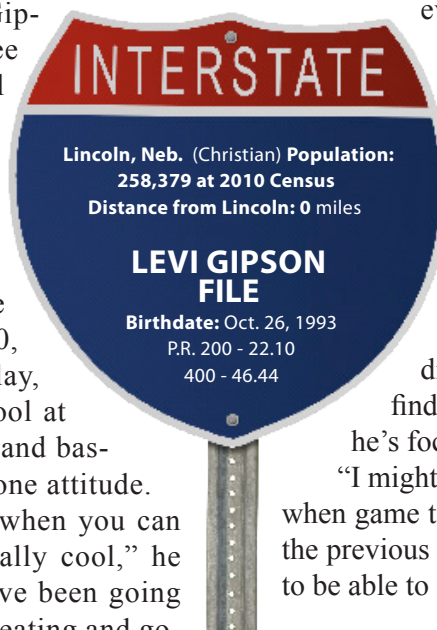
Gipson didn't miss any time, and the Husker coaches are glad he didn't. Breaking the NU 4x400 record and finishing seventh at nationals was all boon after the way Gipson came into Nebraska. This time around everything is easier.

"The workout routine was hard to get into, doing track in college all year," Gipson said. "This year I've felt a lot better, staying healthier, just being smarter with my body and how to keep it healthy."

Gipson said he can still feel some of the scar tissue if he overdoes a sprint, but he's poised to improve upon what he did a year ago. It's being competitive and finding little edges, like creating nerves, that he's focused on now.

"I might not be the fastest person on the track, but when game time comes, who cares about the past and the previous times," he said. "It's about are you going to be able to compete in that moment."

~ Story by Lanny Holstein



Catching up with **JESSE KOSCH**

Punter 1994-97

By Chris Peters/Huskers Illustrated

Former Husker punter Jesse Kosch used to vacation up to Rocky Mountain National Park every year, just to get a glimpse at the mountains.

He dreamed of living up in Estes Park, Colo., being able to soak in the sight of Longs Peak every morning. After helping the Huskers to three national championships in the 1990s – and a brief stint as an Omaha meteorologist – Kosch packed up his bags and headed out west.

“I was single, I didn’t have any other obligations,” he said.

After a few years or working in retail shops on Elkhorn Avenue, the main shopping hub for Estes Park visitors, he bought Big Red of the Rockies – a Nebraska merchandise store 30 minutes from the University of Colorado Boulder. Lincoln store Gary Michael Clothiers co-owner Gary Novotny sold him the store after his brother Gayle, who ran the store since its second year in 1997, felt burnt out and wanted to leave.

Kosch has manned the storefront since 2006. Most years, it only takes a decent month of sales in September to pay for the year’s merchandise. Everything after that is gravy.

This year was different.

As Nebraska prepared for a rematch with UCLA in early September, torrential rain began pelting Colorado. Mud

slid down mountainsides. Rivers broke their banks. Boulder flooded. So did Estes Park.

“It just hit at the worst time,” Kosch said. “Nobody has flood insurance – you can’t get it.”

Kosch cancelled his family’s trip to Idaho Springs, Colo., for his 2-year-old girl’s birthday. He sat in his basement, 15 minutes from his shop, and pumped water out of his basement.

Kosch’s part-time employee moved some things in the shop up to higher ground, but not everything was salvaged.

“The water started coming out of the end of the street toward the west end of town,” Kosch said. “My landlord was about two hours late in putting sandbags in front of the store.”

Days later, Kosch strolled down a closed-down Elkhorn Avenue, which normally hosted a daily traffic jam. The sidewalks, typically packed with shoppers, were empty.

All major highways into Estes Park were closed. People were told not to visit. Residents were told to leave. Kosch walked up to the doorstep of his shop and inched the door open.

“We got about an inch of muck at the front of the store,”



he said. “... I saw the mud and basically just turned around and went home. There was nothing we could do.”

Once power was restored to the town and the carpet was tossed in a dumpster out back, Kosch took a video camera and shot a YouTube video. He panned to each product in his store, described the item and the list price, and hosted the video online.

He revamped the company’s website – BigRedOfTheRockies.com – which before basically just listed the name, location and phone number of the store in addition to a small game day blog for Kosch. He added an online ordering option.

“That was the only way to survive,” Kosch said.

Soon, he was cleared to reopen his doors, but why bother? The highway was destroyed as the Big Thompson River flooded – its worst flood since the 1976 flood that killed 143 people.

Recently, the road reopened in time for the holidays. Business is trickling back, but it isn’t at the same volume it was before the flood. To try and drum up business, Kosch is bringing back a yearly banquet the previous owner used to put on. Kosch has only done it a few times since taking over as owner, but now seems like a better time than ever.



Huskers Illustrated Archives

"I was sitting here like 'Gosh, who can I get? We need a party,'" Kosch said. "And I got Tom Osborne. I went right to the top."

Kosch and his father Bill – a safety on the 1970 and 1971 national championship teams – will tell stories and display their five national championship rings at the event. They're the only father-son pair to have all five Nebraska national championship rings.

Osborne, who was a part of all five as well, will speak at the June 7 event and will sign autographs after a prime rib and mahi-mahi dinner.

Kosch is hoping the event, as well as upcoming centennials for Rocky Mountain National Park (2015) and Estes Park (2017) will boost the town back to normalcy. While the past four months have been rough, he's seeing signs of life.

"December was a pretty good indicator that it's at least close to normal," he said. "Right now, normal would be great."

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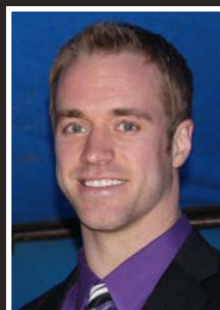
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IN THE RedZone

Carriker, Jones, DuBose top their respective states

Washington native
Adam Carriker makes a
tackle against Colorado.



By Kalani Simpson
Huskers Illustrated

You may or may not have done well in geography in school, but now we're giving you another chance.

Husker geography. That's right — this is the perfect subject for tailgate arguments, bar bets or radio drive-time talk shows (you're welcome).

**Husker
Geography
Part 12**

It's time to answer that age-old question: Who is the best all-time Husker from each state? In the last issue, *Huskers Illustrated* looked at the best players to come out of Oregon and Pennsylvania. This week we move on to Washington, Maryland and Connecticut.

WASHINGTON
Adam Carriker
DL, 2002-06

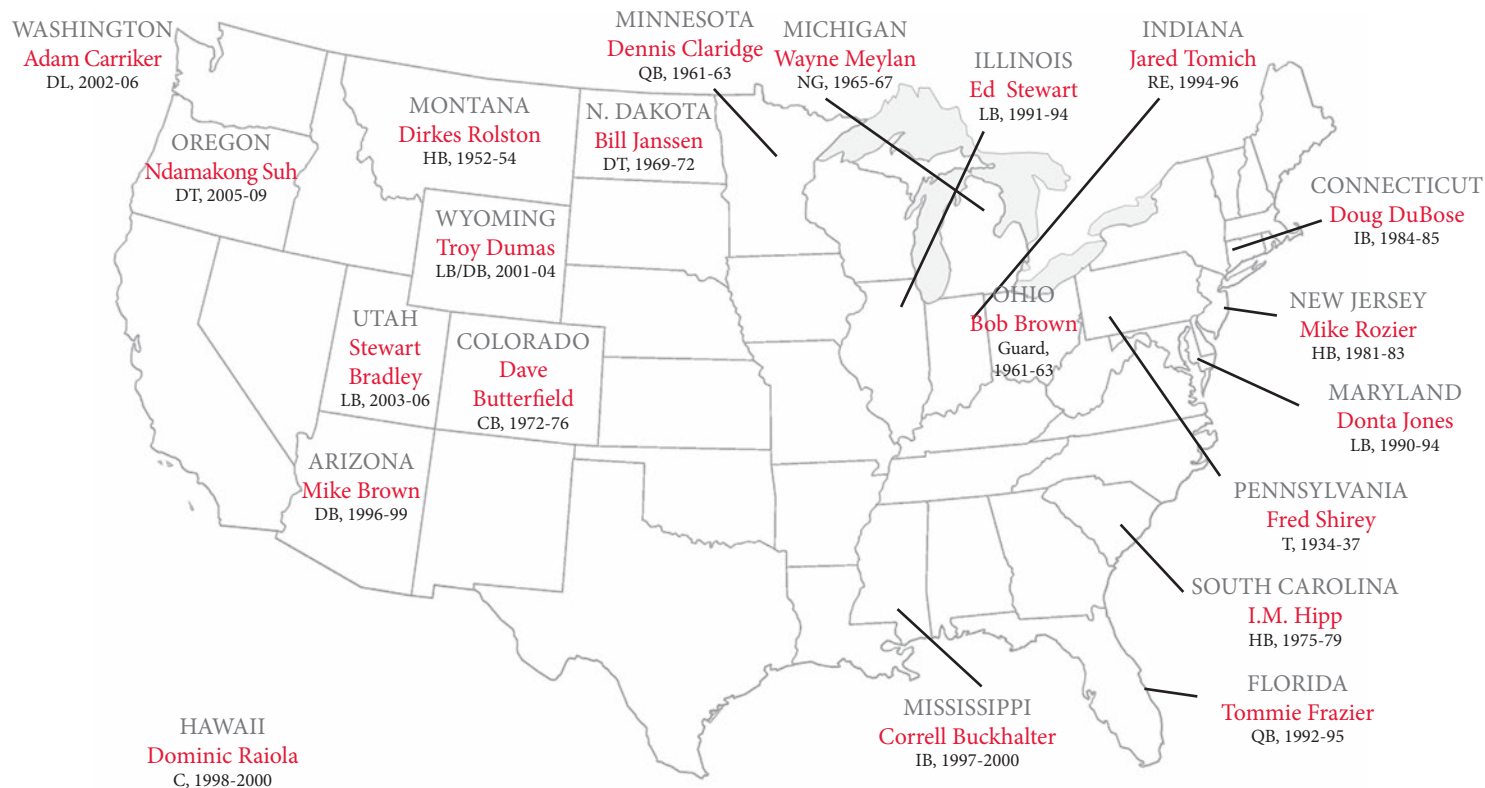
A versatile end who could play the run

or pass, Carriker was named Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year as a senior. He dramatically sacked Texas A&M quarterback Stephen McGee on the last play of the game, to seal a 28-27 win for the Huskers, and with it, the 2006 Big 12 North title.

He was a two-time Nebraska defensive MVP.

He moved to Washington when he was 3. He was born in Nebraska, and destined to play for the Big Red.

All-Time Greatest Huskers From Each State



MARYLAND

Donta Jones
LB, 1990-94

He was breathing down Frank Costa's neck in the 1995 Orange Bowl, when the Huskers finally broke through, and won the 1994 national championship. It was the year Jones finally broke through, too.

Though he'd played in four Orange Bowls and fought through injuries to remain a starter as a junior, it was his senior season that Jones came into his own. He made All-Big 8 as a senior, with 10 tackles for losses, as the Huskers marched toward a national title with a rotating cast of quarterbacks.

In the national title game he harried Costa, the Hurricanes quarterback, with three hurries.

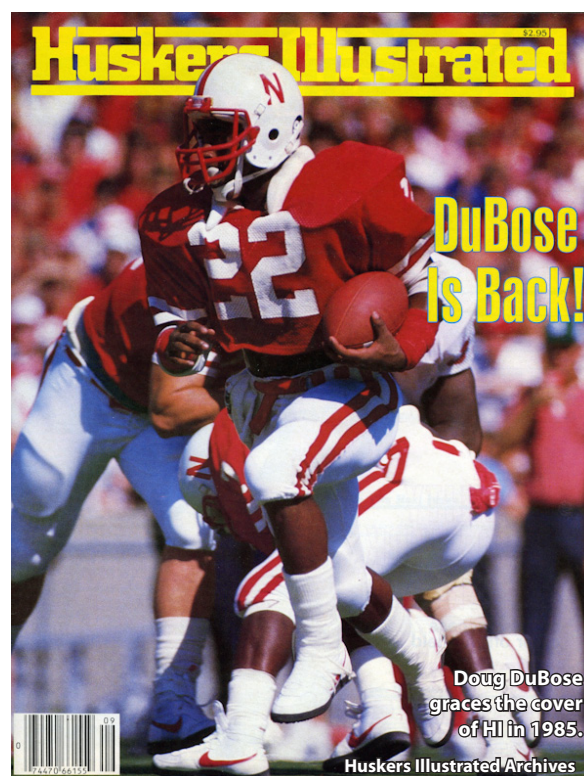
And he loved playing Oklahoma. All through his career, he seemed to have big games when the two rivals met.

Jones made it through hard work. He was twice Lifter of the Year.

CONNECTICUT

Doug DuBose
LB, 1984-85

Watch the old clips. He reminds you of another, more recent vintage, No. 22. He had back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons. And, oh, yes — he gets extra credit for being Brian Bosworth's most hated Husker.



Mary Jones brings back Sweep Left

By Chris Peters

Huskers Illustrated

Mary Jones is trying to bring back Nebraska football's glory days.

Back when the Huskers were regularly winning conference championships, she remembers going downtown to the south end of the Haymarket after football games. The line used to be out the door at Sweep Left, a bar on the ground floor of the old Pepperberg Cigar Factory.

Inside, the carpet was made of AstroTurf. The walls were jam-packed with Husker memorabilia. The windows feature stained glass depictions of Bob Devaney, Tom Osborne and yes, a sweep left play, the bar's logo.

The go-go bar upstairs felt a little weird to her, but that was a part of the character of the place. She always had a good time at Sweep Left – until it closed its doors in 1995.

Now, Jones is bringing Sweep Left back. Its doors re-opened for the first time in almost 20 years in August 2013, two weeks before the season kicked off.

"This was kind of my dream," Jones said.

Jones signed a 10-year lease at 815 O Street, the exact same location as the original. The brick on the side of the building still bears the same Sweep Left logo, albeit a bit faded now.

Inside, not much of the original bar remained after a few other businesses cycled through the property. All she could salvage was part of the old bar and one red road sign that read "94 Back2Back 95" from the bar's final days.

Donations and loans from friends brought in heaps of memorabilia, both old and new. A friend who used to clean defensive end Cameron Meredith's house brought by a giant four-panel picture of Memorial Stadium from the 1990s that he left behind. Another loaned her a Fiesta Bowl jacket.

She bought a brand new bar and a giant cooler to accompany the original bar, which has been moved near the front.

The rest of the rebuild came from Mary's Place, a West O Street bar that Jones worked at for 25 years, owning it for the final 11 years before she closed up shop last year. Her popular pizza oven – now up and running at Sweep Left – went into storage while she left town, along most of what was left from Mary's Place.

"After I had this nightclub for so long and worked there for so long, I wished I could have



CHRIS PETERS/HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED

Mary Jones, longtime owner of Mary's Place, has reopened the Sweep Left bar in downtown Lincoln.

a smaller place," Jones said. "If they could've cut my bar in half, I would've stayed, but there wasn't a convenient way to do it."

Jones spent a few months at Lake Havasu, Ariz., before she came home. She worked as a bartender in the Spring Break hotspot at a resort, but still felt the itch to own her own place again.

So she gathered up some of her old buddies from Mary's Place. She signed a lease at 815 O Street. But she still needed the rights to the name.

After the original owners, former-Huskers Mark Doak and Dennis Pavelka, closed up the place in 1995, the name sat for a while. Former Sweep Left game day regular Steve Sempeck, who owned Elkhorn Lanes in Elkhorn at the time, bought the name from the state for a \$35 fee and used it to name his bowling alley's bar.

When the bowling alley burned down, he moved his operation to a newer alley in Elkhorn and renamed it Sempeck's, but kept the bar's previous name, killing off Sweep Left once more.

Jones' lawyer tracked the name to Sempeck. Once Jones called him up, he was glad to give the name away. By law, he had to charge, so all he asked for was a \$1 gold coin.

"It seemed like the right thing to do that the Sweep Left lives on down there in downtown Lincoln," Sempeck said. "That's just classic Nebraska football tradition."

Sempeck still remembers helping tear the goal posts down after Tom Osborne got his



Mary Jones stands inside the new Sweep Left in the Haymarket.

first win against Oklahoma in the late 1970s. The path from Memorial Stadium led through O Street and straight to the Sweep Left doorstep.

Although the goalposts haven't come down for years, a bright future could be ahead for Nebraska football. Jones is just hoping her reincarnated bar will be a part of it, just like the glory days.

Coaches Corner

with Rhonda Revelle
Head Women's Softball Coach



Huskies Illustrated reporter Lanny Holstein recently visited with Nebraska women's softball coach Rhonda Revelle, who is in her 20th season, to talk about her team's pre-season practices and goals of making it back to the College World Series.

HI: 1. Has anybody new impressed you in preseason practice?

RR: Probably the first one that comes to mind is M.J. Knighten. She's very athletic, and she's working with all returning infielders. She's really starting to get comfortable over there at third base and let her athleticism work for her.

HI: What's it like as a coach before the season starts? Do you have nerves?

RR: No, not really. I just feel like we're kind of tooled up and ready to go. I almost wish we were playing this weekend because I think we're ready for a game.

HI: What do you expect the Big Ten to look like this year?

RR: I said this last year and I think it continues. I really think the Big Ten is on an upward trend with regards to softball. If you look at it, last year we had four teams in the postseason. We had a fifth and sixth team that were on the bubble, and every team in the conference has their ace pitcher back. In the case of Nebraska and Michigan that were in the World Series, we have our entire pitching staffs back."

HI: You talked a lot last year about how internally motivated your team was. Is this team the same way?

RR: I do. I think that's one area that just continued on. It's business as usual, but it's a group that's focused. It's focused, it's fun but very intent when it's time to go to work. You could look at the polls and everything, but we don't even talk about it. It's like we're just going about our work, and I really like that and appreciate that as a coach.

HI: Have you been able to do anything outdoors with the erratic weather?

RR: Our outfielders have been out four times and our team has been out three times. We are flirting with getting outside some more as well, and last year, before we played, we didn't get outside, so we feel like we're ahead of the curve in our world."

This Week

N Husker Athletics

Wednesday, Feb. 12

Men's Basketball

Illinois at Pinnacle Bank Arena 8 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 13

Women's Basketball

Michigan at Ann Arbor, Mich. at 7 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 14

Men's Golf

Big Ten Match Play Championship, Bradenton, Fla.

Women's Bowling

Kat Klash, Houston, Texas

Track & Field

Iowa State Classic, Ames, Iowa
Tyson Invitational, Fayetteville, Ark.

Women's Tennis

Eastern Michigan, Nebraska Tennis Center 5p.m.

Baseball

Pacific at Husker Classic, Tempe, Ariz. 1 p.m.

Softball

Houston at Houston, Texas 4:30 p.m.
Army at Houston, Texas 7 p.m.

Women's Gymnastics

Michigan, Bob Devaney Sports Center 6 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 15

Baseball

Oregon State at Husker Classic, Tempe, Ariz. Noon
Gonzaga at Husker Classic, Tempe, Ariz. 4 p.m.

Softball

Stephen F. Austin at Houston, Texas 11:30 a.m.
Sam Houston State at Houston, Texas 2 p.m.

Men's Tennis

Louisville, Nebraska Tennis Center 11 a.m.
Creighton, Nebraska Tennis Center 7 p.m.

Sunday, Feb. 16

Men's Basketball

Michigan State at East Lansing, Mich., at 2 p.m.

Women's Basketball

Illinois at Champaign, Ill., at 1 p.m.

Diamond Redemption

Huskers motivated by loss to Indiana in finals of Big Ten Tournament

By Lanny Holstein
Huskers Illustrated

Redemption isn't the right word, according to Nebraska baseball coach Darin Erstad. But it's pretty close.

After coming within a win against Big Ten Champion Indiana of making an NCAA regional last season, the Huskers have a bit of unfinished business to attend to this time around. They're more experienced, especially on the mound, and they have a bit of motivation up their sleeves.

"It's been talked about, mostly in the fall," Erstad said of the way 2013 ended at the Big Ten Tournament. "It opened their eyes to a lot of emotions that they were close to feeling. They were close to great things, but had somebody beat them and celebrate right in front of their faces and then go to the College World Series. I would say, as an 18- to 20-year-old kid, that can be pretty motivating."

Nebraska opens the 2014 season Feb. 14 in Tempe, Ariz. The team hosts a four game tournament there that includes a matchup with Baseball America's preseason No. 2, Oregon State.

It's part of Erstad's scheduling strategy. The coach wants to load up on quality competition in the nonconference to bolster the resume come tournament selection time. It nearly worked a year ago, but seven straight losses to open the year put Nebraska behind the eight ball from the outset.

This year, they are more prepared for the early gauntlet, according to the coach.

"I will tell you that from a being prepared standpoint, these guys have put themselves in a position to succeed," Erstad said. "They have worked their tails off."

Two of Nebraska's three returning weekend starters from a year ago put in time in the Cape Cod League this summer, the most prestigious fall league in the nation.

The work juniors Aaron Bummer and Kyle Kubat put in there has already shown in practice, according to Erstad.

Along with senior Christian DeLeon, who stayed in Lincoln this summer to get ahead in the classroom, Bummer and Kubat look like the makings of Nebraska's weekend rotation.

"If they're healthy, they've earned the right to throw on the weekend, absolutely, 100 percent," Erstad said. "What order they'll go in, I don't know that yet."

Neither Kubat nor DeLeon said it was their goal to win the Friday job just yet. Locking in a rotation spot was all they were focused on at their first practice of the spring.

A year ago, DeLeon came in about this time and won a starting job as a fresh face from the junior college ranks.

Nebraska's Ben Miller delivers a pitch during the fall Red-White game.



DARREN IVY/HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED

"That was my main goal was to become a starter and work up to that," he said. "That first week when I got the start, I was thankful for it. Once I got that opportunity, I wasn't going to let it get away from me. I was going to run with it."

Defensively, there are parts of the lineup that look like no-brainers and others that are very much up in the air going into opening weekend.

"I keep an open mind," Erstad said. "You have an idea of how we might piece some guys, there are a couple different combinations that we might try."

A tentative lineup provided by hitting coach Will Bolt had senior Michael Pritchard in left field, freshman Ryan Boldt in centerfield, and junior Austin Darby in right. It also had junior Tanner Lubach catching, sophomore Austin Christiansen at first base, Pat Kelly at second base, Steven Reveles at shortstop, and Blake Headley at third.

Reveles and Christiansen might be new names to Husker

fans, but they are set to make and impact this season. Reveles is a junior college kid who will fight with sophomore Jake Placzek for playing time.

"He's a baseball player," Erstad said of Reveles. "He uses the other side of the field really well, he can run a little bit and he's a guy that just lives and breathes baseball. He loves being out there."

Christiansen is the little brother of former lineup mainstay Chad Christiansen. He's missed each of his first two seasons in Lincoln with injuries, undergoing Tommy John surgery in the fall of 2012. Erstad said he's excited to see him finally in the lineup.

"In practice for two years we've seen him barrel up ball after ball, one after another, so how it will translate in a game with the speed of college baseball we'll see," the coach said. "The kid's been through a lot in two years and is a fantastic story of fighting through that stuff."

The Huskers will also have a new coach in the dugout this season.

Former Husker and Kansas City Royal Ken Harvey joined the team in the offseason as a student manager.

"He brings a lot of experience, not just from the college level but from the professional level," Erstad said of Harvey. "I think it's safe to say his knowledge at the plate is pretty darn good."

10 questions

with James Green
Junior Wrestler

1 Describe that match you had with Iowa's Derek St. John that catapulted you to the No. 1 ranking?

JG: It was just like another match. I went out there and wrestled my game plan. I wrestled him last year and beat him in the Big Tens, so looking at video and stuff, seeing things I could do differently. I tried to widen the gap and score more points.

3 What does it mean to you to be the No. 1 ranked wrestler at 157 pounds?

JG: Yeah. I trained hard to get to where I'm at now, and now that I'm here, I'm just going to train harder to stay here. It's real nice to finally get some recognition, and I'm just going to work harder to stay on top."

4 Do you think you really are the best wrestler at 157 pounds?

JG: Oh yeah, for sure. Look through it, March is just around the corner. We have a couple duals left and then Big Ten. I'm just taking it one match at a time. I'm already wrestling like it's the national finals, thinking I'm already there."

5 Olympic gold medalist Jordan Burroughs is around the team a lot. How would you describe your relationship with him?

JG: We drill a lot. We don't really wrestle too much. When we do, it's really rolling around and working on a few things. He's a little bigger than I am, but it helps. Really, he's good with the whole team. He works out with anybody from about 157 up to 184. He just shares his knowledge with the whole team.

7 You were overseas this summer. Could you ever see yourself as an Olympian?

JG: That's the end goal of course, when I get out of college. I was on the University World Team and didn't get it done this summer, but I'll be trying to win U.S. Opens and get there in college and after college in 2016.

8 Do you get nervous before a match?

JG: I used to, but that's the biggest difference between my freshman year and now. I used to get really nervous just worrying about the coaches expecting so much of me and I expect so much of myself, so I used to put a lot of pressure on myself. Now, I'm more relaxed, and I don't get nervous because I'm so confident.

9 What's your idea of an off day? What would you do with one of those?

DS: "Usually I don't know what to do. There's not too many, but recently I just started bowling. Me and a couple teammates go to the lanes and have some fun.



2 I know you guys lost, but is there something a little different about playing

Iowa? Is there a rivalry brewing there?

JG: Oh, yeah. It's real exciting when you play those guys in the new Devaney. The crowd gets really into it, and it just helps our team get motivated. We're ready to wrestle. They are always the top in the country, so we are trying to knock them off.

6 You guys are similar in a lot of ways. From New Jersey, went to Nebraska, moved up to No. 1 as juniors... Do you ever get compared to him?

JG: All the time. That's just what people are going to do. My future is his past basically. We're both from New Jersey, so we kind of have the same background. It's so funny. As I try to get away from the comparison, I just get closer and closer.

10 What kind of diet are you on?

JG: I'm not really that big at 157, but at the training table they have a bunch of good stuff. I just try to pack on as many calories as I can. I eat a lot of pasta, when they have soup I love that, and red meat. The training table is so good here for the athletes.

-As interviewed by Huskers Illustrated's Lanny Holstein

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

1986 Big 8 Tournament – Colorado

The Huskers set a new high, scoring 90 points in Boulder during the first round of the Big 8 Tournament. Shelly Block sets an NU conference tournament record for assists in a game, sharing the ball 9 times, but it isn't enough, as the Huskers fall 96-90. In the following year's tournament, Block would break the NU rebound record, grabbing 16 against Oklahoma State.

1987 Big 8 Tournament – Kansas

Maurtice Ivy scores 35 points, a new school record for points in a conference tournament game. Her Huskers fail to top the Jayhawks, however, losing 74-73 in a second round heartache. Ivy's 13 field goals also broke her own school record.

1993 NCAA Tournament – San Diego

The Huskers appear in their first NCAA Tournament, playing in front of a home crowd in Lincoln. The 81-58 win is the team's only win the NCAA Tournament, as the Huskers would fall four days later at USC.

1999 NCAA Tournament – Kentucky

Nicole Kubik scores 32 points in a 98-92 first round loss to the Wildcats.

Her point total is the most scored in an NCAA Tournament game by a Husker, out-scoring second-place Kelsey Griffin by 6 points.

The 92 points scored by Nebraska also set a school record at the time.

2010 Big 12 Tournament – Texas A&M

The undefeated Cornhuskers suffer their first loss of the season, falling 80-70 to the Aggies. Dominique Kelley's 18 points weren't enough, as Big 12 Player of the Year Kelsey Griffin sat on the bench in early foul trouble, allowing the Aggies to jump ahead and old on for a win.

2010 NCAA Tournament – Kentucky

Nebraska falls to the Wildcats 76-67 in the third round of the NCAA Tournament, suffering just the second loss of the season. The season ends with the team's first regular season championship and the furthest advancement in the NCAA Tournament in team history.

2011 Big 12 Tournament – Iowa State

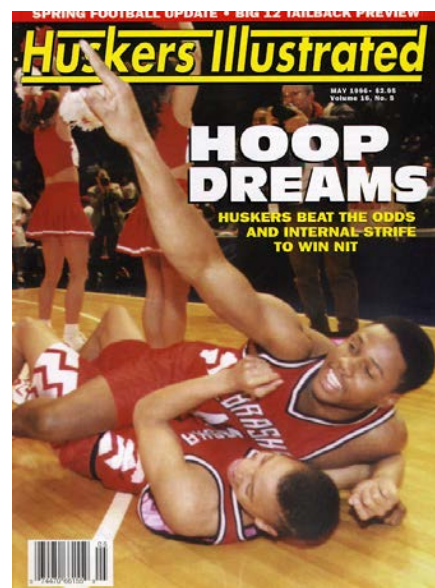
Cathryn Redmon blocks 6 Cyclone shots, but the Huskers can't squeak out a win. Redmon set a new Nebraska record for blocked shots in a conference tournament game as her Huskers fell 69-61.

The team fell one block shy of tying a school record. Redmon finished her Nebraska career with 14 blocked shots in conference tournament games, a school record.

2012 Big 10 Tournament – Purdue

Husker stars Lindsey Moore and Jordan Hooper get battered by the Boilermakers. The two combine for 25 free throws made, earning the top two spots on NU's record list for free throws made in a conference tournament game (Moore – 13, Hooper – 12). Moore's 15 attempted free throws are the most in Nebraska conference tournament history.

Hooper sets another Nebraska record, sinking all 12 field goals, the most shots made with a perfect field goal percentage in a conference tournament for Nebraska. The Huskers lose to the Boilermakers, however, 74-70 in double overtime.



MEN'S BASKETBALL

1985 Big Eight Tournament

Kansas – Brian Carr dishes out 14 assists, a conference tournament record for Nebraska, but the Huskers fall to the Jayhawks 74-69. The Huskers would go on to win the opening round of the NIT before losing in the second round to UCLA.

1986 NCAA Tournament vs. Western Kentucky

Nebraska plays in its first-ever NCAA Tournament. The Huskers fall 67-59, playing without All-Big Eight center Dave Hoppen, whose collegiate career came to an end Feb. 1 when he suffered a knee injury against Colorado. After the game, coach Moe Iba resigns.

1991 NCAA Tournament vs. Xavier

The Huskers play in the first of four-straight NCAA Tournament appearances. Nebraska would fall to Xavier 89-84 and would lose each of the following four appearances.

1994 Big Eight Tournament vs. Oklahoma

Eric Piatkowski sets three Nebraska records, scoring a school-record 42 points in a 105-88 win against the Sooners. His 14 field goals and 23 attempts are both school records as well.

1994 Big Eight Tournament vs. Missouri

Bruce Chubick snags 16 rebounds, a new Nebraska record for a conference tournament. The Huskers topple the No. 3 Tigers 98-91 and advance to the Big Eight Tournament Championship, where they would lose to No. 23 Oklahoma State. In the NCAA Tournament, the Huskers would fall in the first round to Pennsylvania.

1996 NIT Tournament – St. Joseph's

After defeating Colorado State (91-83), Washington State (82-73), Fresno State (83-71) and Tulane (90-78), the Huskers topple St. Joseph's to win the NIT Tournament Championship, the first nation tournament title in school history. Nebraska earns the win by four points by a final score of 60-56 in Madison Square Garden.

1998 NCAA Tournament – Arkansas

Nebraska appears in the NCAA Tournament for the final time, losing to Arkansas 74-65. More than 15 years have passed since the Huskers' last trip to The Big Dance.

Coaches suit up against cancer, honor Harriman's son, Avery

By Chris Peters
Huskers Illustrated

Nebraska basketball coaches and fans slipped out of their traditional scarlet and cream, swapping in orange and green on Jan. 26 in support of Chris Harriman's son Avery.



Chris Harriman

Down the line of the Husker bench, everyone not wearing a basketball uniform donned sneakers and a suit as a part of the Coaches vs. Cancer Suits and Sneakers Awareness weekend. The orange and green seen on shirts and ties nodded to leukemia and bone marrow awareness, respectively.

Behind one basket, in front of a mass of NU students, draped a banner reading #TeamAvery. It was a nod to Harriman's 6-year-old son Avery, a two-time undefeated champion in his fights against cancer.

He and his father were featured in a video at halftime of Nebraska's Jan. 26 82-78 win over Minnesota, followed by an on-court recognition of Avery and other childhood cancer survivors. Throughout the night, booths around the arena administered quick cotton swabs and helped people register for the bone marrow donor registry.

"It means a lot to my family," Harriman said. "Obviously everybody's been affected by cancer, so for us it has true meaning."

Avery was first diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leu-

NU assistant Kenya Hunter dons white sneakers and an orange tie during the Huskers' game with Minnesota.



kemia at age 2 when Harriman was coaching in St. Louis, Mo., under Rick Majerus. The ensuing three-year battle – marked by repetitive doctor visits and heavy doses of medication – seemed to end when the cancer went into remission.

On October 17, 2012, shortly before his first games as a Nebraska assistant coach, Harriman got a call from the doctor saying the cancer was back. This time, Avery needed a bone marrow transplant.

Doctors began with a pool of 4,000 people, then cut it down to 2,000, removing those past the age limit. From there, the number kept whittling down until there were only

three acceptable matches.

One was sick. Another was out of the country.

"We had one chance," Harriman said.

Thankfully, the donor agreed.

Chris, wife Cheryl, Avery and daughter Kacee saw an outpour of support from their new Husker family.

Nancy Osborne dropped off food, Nebraska executive athletic director Marc Boehm and his wife Janelle helped out, as did Billie Papuchis, Darcy Smith, Kristin Eichorst and troves of others with ties to Nebraska athletics.

"I could go on and on about the amount of people who have

just (helped), whether it be picking up my daughter from school or bringing over food to me during the season when I was back and forth and just helping out in any way," Harriman said. "Obviously Coach Miles has been incredible. Just anything I've needed, whether it be, 'Coach, I need a day off. I've got to go to the hospital.'

"It's been a blessing, a complete blessing, to be here during this time, and it's something that I didn't anticipate, that's for sure."

Now, one year after his transplant, Avery is cancer-free.

"He's doing great. He's doing really, really, really well," Harriman said. "Obviously back in school, and I would say functioning at an almost-normal life. I'm not sure if he can be at that point just yet, but he is off all his medicines, which is the most important thing.

"He's in school and living in less of a bubble than what he was in the past. So he's doing really, really, really well. He's healthy and getting stronger every day."

Nebraska's game with Minnesota was a celebration of Avery's triumph. It was also a way to spread the word.

By encouraging more people to join the donor registry, Harriman and his Nebraska family are trying to ensure more kids get a happy ending like Avery.

"It's really simple," Harriman said. "All it is is a cotton swab in your mouth, and that's the only commitment you're making. You just go into an expanded registry and hope that at some point you can give another little kid like Avery a chance, because if we didn't have that, I'm not sure where we'd be right now."

NU has developed home court advantage

By Brian Rosenthal

Huskers Illustrated

Tom Crean felt the energy at Pinnacle Bank Arena. He sensed the swelling fan support from Nebraska's basketball fans. He heard the passion.

And that was merely from watching film of the Huskers' home games.

"You can see it, you can hear it," said Crean, the Indiana coach, "and I think they are responding very well to it."

Crean uttered those words before he'd even set foot in Nebraska's new home for basketball in Lincoln's West Haymarket District.

His stance hadn't likely changed, either, after 15,107 fans roared their approval of Nebraska's 60-55 victory over Indiana on Jan. 31.

In fact, NU players and coaches credited the crowd for stirring the Huskers' rally from a 16-point first-half deficit.

"We really feed off of them," Nebraska sophomore Shavon Shields said. "The place gets rocking in here. When we make plays and even on defense, the place just gets louder and louder. And then we get another steal and it gets even louder. I didn't even know it was possible to get that loud. It got super loud tonight. We really feed off of that."

Freshman Nathan Hawkins agreed.

"When we get going, it's like a tin can," Hawkins said. "It's loud, and it gets going. It's a big booster for us. It gets our adrenaline pumping, we're ready to run, and then it rattles the other team. You can't hear your coach. You can't hear yourself think. It's a big boost for us."

They say if you build it, they will come, and Nebraska fans have done just that, and then some, in helping second-year coach Tim Miles and his team establish Pinnacle Bank Arena has

a serious home-court advantage that makes Nebraska as much of a Big Ten school as does a gray November football Saturday.

The Huskers entered February with a 10-1 home record, with the lone loss by one point to Michigan, the defending NCAA Tournament runner-up which used that game as part of a 10-game winning streak to rise to the Associated Press Top 10.

Nebraska has defeated Florida Gulf Coast, Miami, Ohio State and the aforementioned Hoosiers, all teams that advanced to last year's Sweet 16.

"They really should have beaten Michigan at home," said Minnesota coach Richard Pitino, whose Gophers lost by four points in Lincoln. "It's a great home-court advantage. They are rallying around that building and have a newfound enthusiasm for that program."

Nebraska sold out of season tickets months before the season began. That didn't mean, of course, that every game would necessarily draw crowds that big, especially for a program in rebuilding mode.

"At first I didn't (know), but as the games went on, you could tell that people were liking what Coach Miles is putting together here, and everybody's being really supportive," sophomore Walter Pitchford said. "Husker fans are the number one fans in the nation. It helps us out a lot when they come to our games. They proved me wrong, I'll say that."

Nebraska entered February averaging 15,239 fans while drawing the seven largest home crowds in school history. The Huskers' previous single-season attendance record of 13,357 was set in 1992-93 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"You saw the size and the capability of the arena," Hawkins said, "and then after that first game against Florida Gulf Coast,

2013-14 Men's Basketball Schedule

Nov. 4, 2013	UNK (exhibition)	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 91-60
Nov. 8, 2013	Florida Gulf Coast	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 77-59 1-0
Nov. 12, 2013	Western Illinois	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 62-47, 2-0
Nov. 17, 2013	S.C. State	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 83-57, 3-0
Nov. 21, 2013	UMASS	Charleston, S.C.	L, 96-90, 3-1
Nov. 22, 2013	UAB	Charleston, S.C.	L, 87-74, 3-2
Nov. 24, 2013	Georgia	Charleston, S.C.	W, 73-65 4-2
Nov. 30, 2013	Northern Illinois	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 63-58 5-2
Dec. 4, 2013	Miami	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 60-49 6-2
Dec. 8, 2013	Creighton	Omaha, Neb.	L, 82-67 6-3
Dec. 14, 2013	Arkansas State	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 79-67 7-3
Dec. 21, 2013	The Citadel	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 77-62 8-3
Dec. 28, 2013	Cincinnati	Cincinnati, Ohio	L, 74-59 8-4
Dec. 31, 2013	Iowa	Iowa City, Ia.	L, 67-57 8-5
Jan. 4, 2013	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio	L, 84-53 8-6
Jan. 9, 2013	Michigan	Lincoln (PBA)	L, 71-70 8-7
Jan. 12, 2013	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.	L, 70-64 8-8
Jan. 20, 2013	Ohio State	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 68-62 9-8
Jan. 23, 2013	Penn State	University Park, Pa.	L, 58-54 9-9
Jan. 26, 2013	Minnesota	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 82-78 10-9
Jan. 30, 2013	Indiana	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 60-55 11-9
Feb. 5, 2013	Michigan	Ann Arbor, Mich.	L, 79-50 11-10
Feb. 8, 2013	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	W, 63-59 12-10
Feb. 12, 2013	Illinois	Lincoln (PBA)	7 p.m.
Feb. 16, 2013	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.	2 p.m.
Feb. 20, 2013	Penn State	Lincoln (PBA)	6 p.m. (ESPN2)
Feb. 23, 2013	Purdue	Lincoln (PBA)	11 a.m./3 p.m.
Feb. 26, 2013	Illinois	Champagne, Ill.	8 p.m.
March 1, 2013	Northwestern	Lincoln (PBA)	4 p.m. (ESPN2)
March 5, 2013	Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.	6 p.m.
March 9, 2013	Wisconsin	Lincoln (PBA)	4:15 or 6:30 p.m.
March 13, 2013	Big Ten Tourney	Indianapolis, Ind.	TBA

I was like, 'OK, it's clear we can do it, it's just a matter of if we're going to.' And we have. The fans have been there every game, loud and ready to go."

That atmosphere fits in perfectly with the Big Ten Conference, which prides itself on tough home-court advantages and sold-out crowds. The Big Ten has led the nation in attendance for 37 consecutive years, and the emergence of Pinnacle Bank Arena will undoubtedly help stretch that

streak to 38.

"It's been a blessing for us," said Miles, whose repeated pleas to Nebraska fans to make noise have mostly been answered. "I want their ears ringing when they walk out of here."

The state-of-the-art arena was built for basketball and with basketball sight lines, unlike some multi-purpose arenas, like Omaha's CenturyLink Center, that were designed for hockey. Those arenas have more gradual and spread-out

Terran Petteway dunks against Minnesota during NU's 82-78 victory on Jan. 26 at the Pinnacle Bank Arena.



MITCH OTTO/HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED

seating, especially on the ends, whereas Pinnacle Bank Arena has fans seated closer to the action.

Hence, more noise, and, in turn, more wins.

Nebraska has five home

games remaining, and should the Huskers win out, they'd finish with their first one-loss home season since the 1990-91 season, when Nebraska was 14-1 at the Devaney Center. Only four

times since then, most recently in 2010-11, has Nebraska finished a season with as few as two home losses.

"I've been in places like this," Miles said, "and this can be a

spectacular place for the home team, the home crowd, the hometown, the state of Nebraska, and we've got to let our opponents know that this is really going to be a difficult place for them to win."

NU retires Kelsey Griffin's No. 23 jersey

By Chris Peters

Huskers Illustrated

Kelsey Griffin has officially joined the ranks of the Nebraska women's basketball elite.

Griffin's No. 23 jersey was retired and put up in the rafters of Pinnacle Bank Arena before Nebraska's Jan. 29 bout with Michigan. She joins Karen Jennings (No. 51) and Maurice Ivy (No. 30) as the only three Huskers to have their jerseys retired.

"It's really hard to put into words what this means to me," Griffin said. "It was never a plan of mine or a goal of mine, coming to Nebraska. I know it's a personal award, but there are so many people that helped me accomplish it."

Griffin attended Nebraska as a power forward and as a pre-med student for five years from 2005-10, redshirting during the 2008-09 season because of a severe ankle injury. In her four years on the court, she totaled 2,033 points and 1,019 rebounds, appearing and starting in 127 games – the second-most in school history. She finished her career with a school record 40 double-doubles, also ranking second in rebounds, third in points and seventh in scoring average and blocked shots.

In her senior season, Griffin led the Huskers to a perfect 29-0 record in the regular season, reaching the school's first Sweet Sixteen in the NCAA Tournament. That season, she averaged more than 20 points and 10 rebounds per game, earning First-Team All-American honors, Big 12 Player of the Year honors and the Lowe's Senior CLASS Award, also being named a national player-of-the-year finalist.

"Kelsey is kind of a once-in-a-lifetime player," coach Connie Yori said. "I've coached a lot of really good players, but Kelsey's the best that I've coached. There's no doubt that

she deserves to have her jersey hanging in the rafters because she is one of the best to put the uniform on."

After Nebraska, Griffin was selected No. 3 overall in the 2010 WNBA Draft by the Minnesota Lynx, but was traded on draft day to the Connecticut Sun. Her rookie year saw her earn a spot on the All-Rookie team, but her numbers soon declined after moving from power forward to small forward.

"Learning in the best league in the world a new position was challenging," Griffin said. "From my rookie year to my third year in the league, you could see that my minutes were getting smaller and smaller. Eventually I really wasn't a player."

Last season, the Sun hired new coach Anne Donovan, who moved Griffin back to her natural power forward role. Since making the switch, her 2013 season averages are the highest of her career in nearly every statistical category.

"I had a 20-point game and several 17-point games but also made a difference," Griffin said. "I proved that I could defend bigger players than me. The WNBA, I felt, was quite happy with my performance last season."

In the offseason, Griffin plays overseas. Early in her career, she played for teams in Hungary and Israel until joining the Bendigo Spirit in Australia in 2012. Since then, she has led the team to the WNBL title and earned MVP honors in the championship series.

This season, she is averaging more than 12 points and 8 rebounds per game for the Spirit.

After returning home for the jersey retirement ceremony – attended by a few former-teammates and fellow-jersey-retiree Jennings – Griffin returned to

2013-14 Women's Basketball Schedule

Oct 27, 2013	Pitt State (exh.)	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 98-47
Nov. 3, 2013	UNK (exhibition)	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 75-34
Nov. 8, 2013	UCLA	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 77-49 1-0
Nov. 11, 2013	Alabama	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 62-48 2-0
Nov. 15, 2013	Utah	Salt Lake City	W, 75-69 3-0
Nov. 21, 2013	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 78-55 4-0
Nov. 24, 2013	Southern	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 87-64 5-0
Nov. 27, 2013	UMASS-Lowell	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 77-42 6-0
Nov. 30, 2013	Washington State	Lincoln (PBA)	L, 76-72 6-1
Dec. 4, 2013	North Carolina	Chapel Hill, N.C.	L, 74-62 6-2
Dec. 8, 2013	Utah State	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 95-75 7-2
Dec. 14, 2013	Creighton	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 63-38 8-2
Dec. 21, 2013	South Dakota	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 87-53 9-2
Dec. 29, 2013	Oral Roberts	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 89-53 10-2
Jan. 2, 2013	Northwestern	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 66-65 11-2
Jan. 9, 2013	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.	L, 70-57 11-3
Jan. 12, 2013	Illinois	Champaign, Ill.	W, 75-56 12-3
Jan. 16, 2013	Minnesota	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 88-85 13-3
Jan. 19, 2013	Purdue	Lincoln (PBA)	L, 77-75 13-4
Jan. 26, 2013	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	L, 63-59 13-5
Jan. 29, 2013	Michigan	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 84-51 14-5
Feb. 1, 2013	Iowa	Iowa City, Ia.	W, 80-67 15-5
Feb. 5, 2013	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.	W, 71-70 16-5
Feb. 8, 2013	Michigan State	Lincoln (PBA)	W, 76-56 17-5
Feb. 13, 2013	Michigan	Ann Arbor, Mich.	6 p.m.
Feb. 16, 2013	Indiana	Lincoln (PBA)	12 p.m.
Feb. 20, 2013	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio	6 p.m.
Feb. 24, 2013	Penn State	Lincoln (PBA)	6 p.m.
Feb. 27, 2013	Illinois	Lincoln (PBA)	TBA
March 2, 2013	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.	2 p.m.
March 6-9, 2013	Big Ten Tourney	Indianapolis, Ind.	TBA
March 22-25	NCAA 1st & 2nd	TBA	TBA

Australia to continue playing. She said her career will span as long as she can keep it going. Rather than going into coaching after basketball, she said she would rather try and get involved in medicine.

Although Griffin's jersey will hang from Pinnacle Bank Arena and is considered retired, her number will still be used. Junior forward Emily Cady currently wears Griffin's 23 and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Yori said there are no

plans to permanently retire the number, only to symbolically recognize Griffin's accomplishments.

Current Husker Jordan Hooper, who likely will join Griffin, Ivy and Jennings in the rafters someday, is drawing closer to all-time NU records for scoring and rebounding. As of the Michigan State game, her 2,111 points was third behind Jennings (2,405) and Ivy (2,131) and her 1,023 rebounds was second to Janet Smith's 1,280.

Jordan Hooper scores her 2000th point on this shot against Minnesota earlier this season.



MITCH OTTO/HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED

Early Commitments

STORY BY CHRIS PETERS/COURTESY PHOTO

Cook recruits several years out when it comes to volleyball classes

Most of the players John Cook recruits aren't even old enough to drive a car.

The bulk of elite volleyball players are going on unofficial visits during junior high and early high school, according to Cook. As they travel around the country with club teams, they stop off at universities, often for camps, and form an early relationship with coaches.

Cook doesn't waste his time trying to recruit seniors, and he rarely takes the time to talk to juniors – most are already committed. And once they pledge to a school, it's an unspoken rule not to try and recruit them, he said.

Instead, he scouts eighth, ninth and 10th graders. Parents and players want to make college plans early.

Before twins Kadie and Amber Rolfzen committed to Nebraska as eighth graders back in 2009, the youngest commit Cook ever had was high school sophomore Jordan Larson. Now, almost all of his commits are sophomores or younger.

"The high school kids are driving it because they're visiting earlier and earlier," Cook said. "It's a perpetual thing that's gotten worse over the years."

Cook already has commitments for the class of 2016 – currently high school sophomores. Molly Haggerty will be the third Husker Haggerty – joining 2014 commit Maddie and current Husker Meghan. Ohio setter Hunter Atherton joined the class after visiting earlier in the season when the Huskers hosted Northwestern.

Both players called Cook. He's not allowed to call them.



Sisters Maddie, Meghan and Molly Haggerty are poised to become the first trio of sisters to play for the Huskers.

No coaches are allowed to do official recruiting, per NCAA rules, until the player's senior season. By then, Cook said, it's basically all done.

"In our recruiting world, we're identifying ninth and 10th graders because they're already visiting," Cook said. "We probably had six ninth graders visit (last season)."

"All of our recruiting is done unofficially. You have to project where these kids are going to be."

That's the bulk of how Cook recruits. He goes to camps nationwide to watch players. He studies their frame, their skills and where they might project.

In February, players file into Cook's backyard for a camp at the Century Link Center in Omaha. From there, he and assistant coaches travel out to Arizona, Illinois, Missouri and all corners of the country, searching for talent.

"Every other weekend, I will be in a gym somewhere," Cook said. "... We look at how functional they are, how

they move, how good their arm strength is, how they will develop. It's very, very difficult to be able to project. There's a real art to it."

Once he identifies a few targets, his main focus is showing off the program when the players come on unofficial visits.

During unofficial visits, coaches and players aren't allowed to interact with recruits outside campus. Cook tries to unite the team for an on-campus meal before he takes the recruit on a campus tour, heavily focused on athletic facilities.

"The biggest thing is seeing a match," Cook said. "... If there's a football game, that's a bonus."

From there, Cook will either offer a scholarship or he'll stay in contact. Once the offer's out, the ball is in the recruit's court.

Only on rare occasions will Cook make offers during the official visit period of a player's senior year. Usually,

it's when Nebraska loses a player and needs to fill an immediate need.

He'll either look at seniors, potential transfers or international players – like Cecilia Hall, who he found through an international contact.

Cook has shown he can be quite successful recruiting players young. Nebraska's 2013 class – highlighted by the Rolfzens – earned the No. 1 distinction by PrepVolleyball.com.

Even so, Cook would rather things change. He sees players transfer from schools every year because the decision they made three years before college turned out not to be the correct one.

"There's a lot of pressure on the kids. We really need to change it," Cook said.

He tells parents "They don't even have their drivers' licenses, they're not ready to make those decisions yet."

Cook advocates for a bonus year of official visits. By allowing students to visit officially during their junior year and by allowing coaches to reach out to players, the parents and players will feel less pressure to create connections on their own – reducing the need to act early, he said.

"I just think it'll bring a calm – they won't feel so rushed," Cook said.

Current NCAA rules allow coaches to make one weekly telephone call to recruits during their junior season, but do not allow official visits. NCAA Division I men's basketball is the one exception. In 2012, the sport adopted a rule change that allows second-semester juniors to take official visits.

NU'S PROFESSIONAL VB PLAYERS

Story by Chris Peters • Photo by Mitch Otto



Kelsey Robinson's professional career hasn't had an ideal start.

Just a few weeks after joining her professional team in Puerto Rico, Robinson boarded a flight home to Illinois to have a doctor inspect her injured shoulder.

"Most (outside hitters) have shoulder pain to some degree," she said. "It just comes with it, so I've had pain for a while and then popped it in practice down there."

During Robinson's time at Nebraska, both her and coach John Cook were cautious regarding Robinson's durability this season, monitoring her swings and making sure she didn't overexert herself. At Tennessee, her school for three years before Nebraska, she often felt fatigued because of repetitive swings.

In Puerto Rico, her practices lasted three to four hours per day, she said. Eventually, after a few good weeks of practice, her shoulder popped in practice, sending her back home in late January. When she returned home, she wasn't sure yet what her injury was, but was hoping to return to Puerto Rico this season if possible.

After a stellar year at Nebraska where Robinson won Big Ten Player of the Year and was a national player of the year finalist, Robinson headed the route many former Huskers have gone. She joined the Guaynabo Mets, a team in Liga de Voleibol Superior Femenino, Puerto Rico's professional women's volleyball league.

ball league.

"There's leagues all over the world," Cook said. "The thing about the Puerto Rico league is that it starts in January. For somebody graduating in December, that makes sense."

"For somebody like Kelsey, Puerto Rico is her only option because of when the league starts."

During her short time in Puerto Rico, she developed strong chemistry with Lauren Cook, with whom she became friends after arriving at Nebraska in spring 2013.

"It was awesome getting a chance to play with Lauren," Robinson said. "Her sets were great and perfect for how I play."

When Robinson rejoins Cook in Puerto Rico, she'll also join former-Husker Hannah Werth in the league, which has turned into a bit of a Husker pipeline.

Coach John Cook said the high number of Huskers heading to the island speaks volumes to the type of players his program is producing. The league down in Puerto Rico only takes 16 American players each season, he said, so it takes an elite talent to get an invite to join a team in the league.

Once in Puerto Rico, Cook's former players have fared well.

Last season, Cook's daughter led the league in setting while former-Husker Gina Mancuso earned the league's MVP award. Husker greats Nancy Metcalf and Jordan Larson have also been named the league's MVP in past years.

"Nebraska has a reputation that our players go down there and do well," Cook said. "They don't go down there to party at the beach. Nebraska has a very good reputation in Puerto Rico."

Players typically only play in Puerto Rico for a season or two before heading off to different countries to compete, Cook said.

After earning her MVP award, Metcalf played for different teams around the country and now plays in Japan and is one of the highest paid players in the world, Cook said. Professionals can earn anywhere from \$2,000 a month to \$1 million.

Larson currently plays in Russia while Sarah Pavan competes in Brazil. Other former-Huskers are scattered all around the globe.

2014 NEBRASKA SOCCER COMMITS

By Darren Ivy
Huskers Illustrated

Nebraska head soccer coach John Walker revealed his 2014 recruiting class on Feb. 4.

The Huskers, who are coming off a 19-4-1 season that saw them make the NCAA

Tournament for the first time in eight years, will add 12 players.

The recruiting class includes girls from eight states - one in-state recruit, along with four from Illinois as well as one each from California, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon and across the bor-

der in British Columbia.

The Huskers, who were 2013 Big Ten regular-season and tournament champions for the fourth time in school history, will look for this class to help replace six senior starters, including two who went to the Houston Dash professional team.

LIA BALDO



BROOKS BRENNAN



EMILEE CINCOTTA



HALEY HANSON



AMANDA HILTON



ERIKA JOHNSON



MICHAELA LOEBEL



ALLI PETERSON



SAMI REINHARD



HANNAH SCHAFERS



NIKKI TURNEY

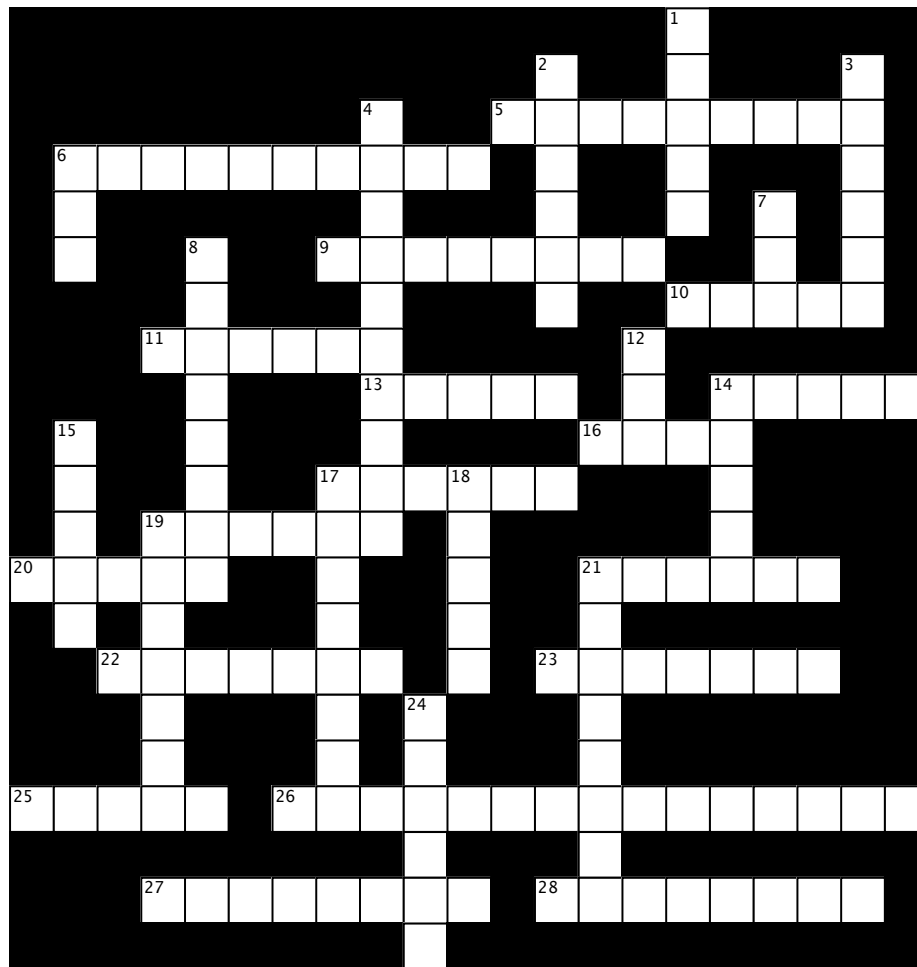


SAVANAH UVEGES



Name	Pos.	Ht.	Hometown, State (HS/Club)
Lia Baldo	F	5-9	Glenview, Ill. (Loyola Academy/FC Chicago)
Brooks Brennan	D	5-9	Albuquerque, N.M. (Academy/Rio)
Emilee Cincotta	MF	5-8	Tigard, Ore. (Tigard/Crossfire)
Haley Hanson	MF	5-6	Overland Park, Kan. (Olathe East/Sporting Blue Valley)
Amanda Hilton	MF	5-5	West Chicago, Ill. (St. Charles East/Strikers Fox Valley)
Erika Johnson	GK	5-10	North Oaks, Minn. (Mounds View/Dakota Rev)
Michaela Loebel	F	5-9	Geneva, Ill. (Geneva/Strikers Fox Valley)
Alli Peterson	D	5-9	Iowa City, Iowa (Iowa City West/Sereno)
Sami Reinhard	MF	5-8	Long Beach, Calif. (Woodrow Wilson Classical/Beach Futbol)
Hannah Schafers	D	5-7	Lincoln, Neb. (Pius X/Gretna Prima)
Nikki Turney	D	6-0	Surrey, B.C. (Fraser Heights/Vancouver Whitecaps)

MARCH CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

5. Defensive line coach
6. April 12 event
9. 2014 Homecoming opponent
10. Place-kicker recruit
11. 2016 non-conference opponent
13. Offensive line recruit from Las Vegas
14. Number of recruits from Edna Karr High School in New Orleans
16. Quarterback recruit who was a late addition to 2014 class
17. Associate head coach
19. Linebacker recruit from New Orleans
20. Ex-NU linebacker named first-team All-Pro selection
21. Defensive line recruit from Kansas
22. Running back recruit from Texas
23. Ameer Abdullah's home state
25. 2014 non-conference opponent
26. Opponent in 2014 opener
27. Uplifting Athletes' 2014 Rare Disease Champions Award winner
28. Second Husker selected in 2013 NFL Draft

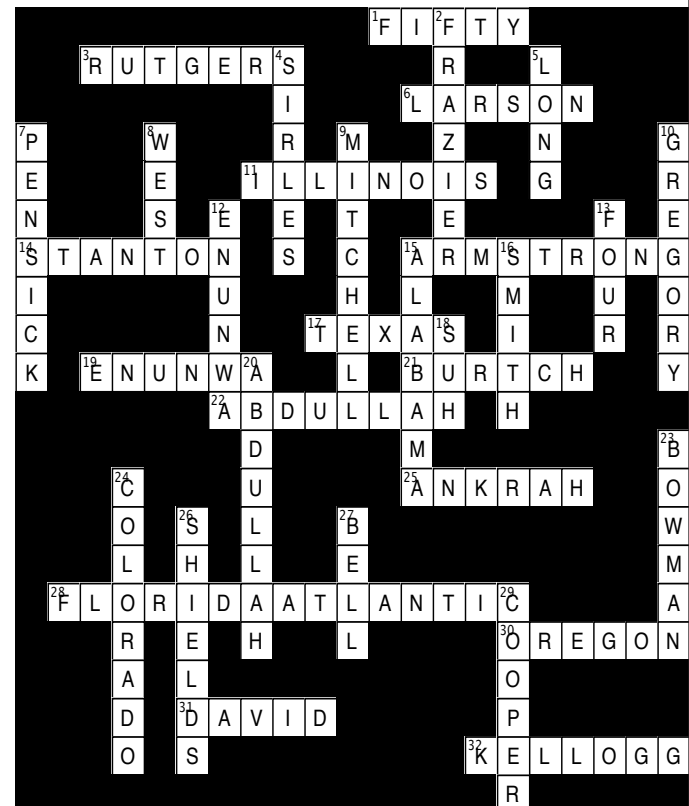
DOWN

1. Defensive end recruit who joined program in January
2. 1997 Outland Trophy winner
3. Running back recruit from Chicago
4. Quarterback recruit who joined program in January
6. Ex-NU defensive lineman named first-team All-Pro selection
7. Number of signees from Lincoln Southeast High School in 2014 class
8. First Husker selected in 2013 NFL Draft
12. 2015 non-conference opponent
14. Number of recruits from Texas in 2014 recruiting class
15. Wore retired number 60
17. Defensive back recruit who joined program in January
18. Number of in-state signees in 2014 recruiting class
19. 1997 Lombardi Award winner
21. May 8-10 event
24. New defensive backs coach



Jessie DeZiel competes for the Huskers at the Tumble N Rumble event on Jan. 11.

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